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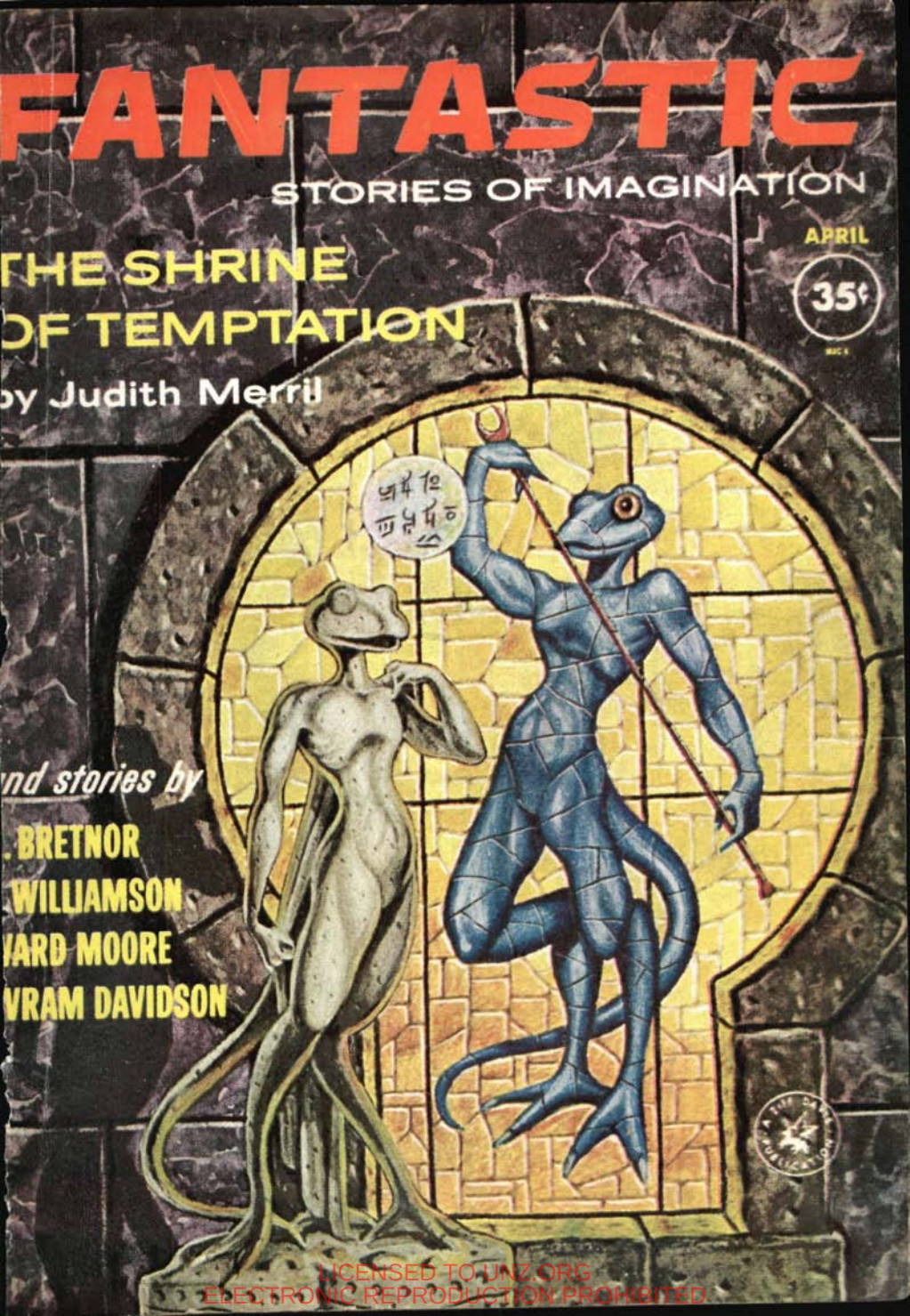

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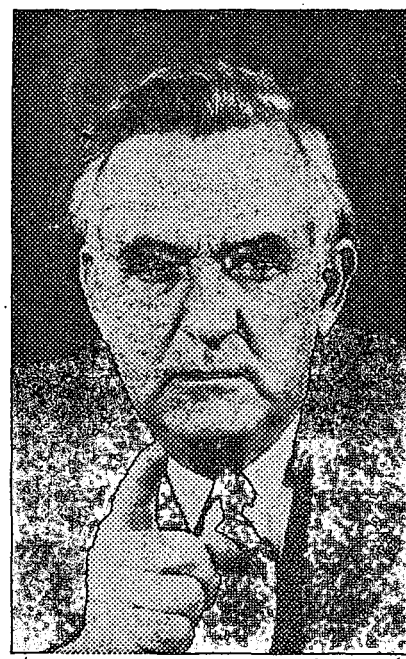

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STORIES OF IMAGINATION

APRIL 1962
Volume 11 Number 4

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NOVELET

NONSTOP TO MARS (Fantasy Classic)
By Jack Williamson 94

SHORT STORIES

THE SHRINE OF TEMPTATION
By Judith Merril 10

DR. BIRDMOUSE
By R. Bretnor 27

SERIAL

JOYLEG *(Conclusion)*
By Ward Moore and Avram Davidson 42

FEATURES

EDITORIAL 6

ACCORDING TO YOU 8

COMING NEXT MONTH 41

1961 HUGO NOMINATION BALLOT 128

Cover: GEORGE BARR

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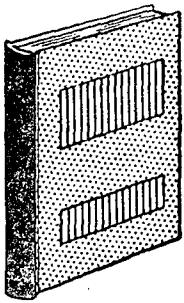

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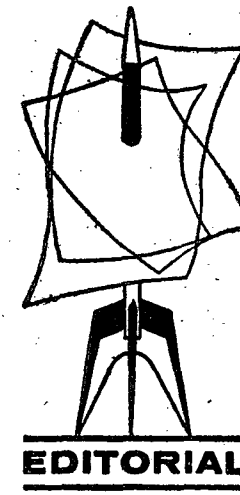

TRUTH continues to be more fantastic than fantasy, and any weird-tale writer who came up with the two ideas we are to talk about today would be welcomed with open arms by an editor who knows how dull so much of fictional fantasy has become.

Item one: the case of the oddball star. That's right: oddball. The sober scientists of Caltech who discovered it gave it that appellation themselves. It is so oddball that it may require an entirely new theory of high-energy rections to explain why it is what it is, or acts as it does. The oddball star's right name is 3 Centauri A, situated in a cluster of about 100 stars 3,500,000,000,000,000 miles from earth. It is 20,000,000 years old. Although it is 27,000 degrees hot (thrice as hot as Sol); and although hot stars rotate rapidly, Oddball does not rotate at all. It contains from 100 to 10,000 times as much of such rare elements as gallium and phosphorus, but it is short on usually-abundant oxygen and helium. It is the first star in which the rare isotope helium 3 has been seen. It has all the attributes of the so-called magnetic stars, and yet it has no general magnetic field.

The significance of all this deponent—as well as the Caltech scientists—knoweth not. But we cheerfully give Oddball to Jack Sharkey. We feel he will know better what to do with it than anyone.

Item 2: among the discoveries reported at an M.I.T. symposium on bio-magnetics was the fact that paramecia and worms turn to the right or the left according to phases of the moon and the time of the year. Conclusion by the scientists: one-celled animals and some simple worms can detect geophysical magnetic fields, differentiate between the magnetic poles, and also between fields that lie parallel and at right angles to their bodies.

In the experiments, the worms turned to the right during the winter full moon, and the left in the new moon. During the summer the worms turned to the right on new and full moons, and to the left at each quarter. The results, biologists said, "is inexplicable to physicists and most biologists . . . there is no known mechanism that could account for the extraordinary biomagnetic sensitivities . . ."

Now, suppose the worms were exposed to the phases of Oddball!

—NL.

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According to you...

Dear Editor:

In December FANTASTIC there was a story by David Ely, "The Last Friday In August." I read it sidewise, backwards and upside down—including the conventional way—still, the logic in it escaped me. Not even a plausible misinterpretation could I come up with. Even the title offered me no clue as to what was on "William's" mind, or what his so-called mission was.

I won't die if I am not furnished with an answer. Yet, I would "indeed" be relieved to find out where the significance of this story has been so cleverly buried.

William Krieger
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● *Like many good stories, this one leaves you free to make your own interpretation: the end of a world? A man driven into insane hallucinations by the crowds of an over-populated world? A retelling of the Christ legend, man's sacrifice for his fellows? Not logic, perhaps, but feelings.*

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

Have just finished reading the January issue and all in all was favorably impressed. I must admit that the Gardner story gave me a few bad moments, but when I had finished the rest of the magazine all was forgiven, or nearly so, anyway.

I liked the Garrett story *Hepcats of Venus* and hope that he is planning a series on this basis. It is very promising material for one. One hopes that the lady on the cover is not meant to be Our Heroine, for if she is she should be smacked sharply on the wrist and sent back to Adapt-

(Continued on page 125)

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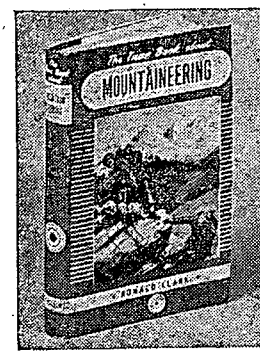

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the SHRINE of TEMPTATION

By JUDITH MERRIL

Illustrator DOMERI

The ritual went on as always—until Lallayall embraced the sinuous figure of the Lifegiver, and the secret of the Rebirth was acted out before horrified eyes.

THE name his own people called him was Lallayall. That was, of course, just his calling-name, and because it meant almost the same thing to us, we called him Lucky.

This was no transgression of courtesy, or culture-arrogance on our part. His true name, after the fashion of his people, was already long, and growing, a descriptive catalogue useful only for records and ritual occasions. A calling-name may be anything derived from the whole, so long as it suits, and the called one will answer it. Lucky was delighted to have a new nickname from us, in our language.

He was, when we came to the island, just eight years old—as we reckon. His people count differently; to them, he was halfway through his Third Decade; in five more seasons, he would undergo the Apprenticeship Rites that would end his First Age. Either way, he was just past the midpoint between babyhood and puberty. Like most of his race—and all others but us on the island—he was brown-skinned and dark-eyed, black haired. Like most of his age, he was eager, questioning, rational, mystical, obedient, rebellious, clumsy and courteous, graceful and quick; like too few of them, he was generally happy and always healthy, serenely certain of parental love, highly intelligent and well-informed.

Certain of these things, and all of them to a degree, were the

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product of Shrine island culture. Lucky lived in a world he accepted as having been designed primarily for his own benefit and, largely, it had. Among the Island children, there were no fears, hungers, troubles or questions that could not be voiced, and none—within the limits of the island's capacity—that would not be answered to the best extent of the child's understanding. All children were swift and bright; but among them, Lucky was especially blessed. Thus, his name.

HE WAS the first in his age group to find his apprenticeship. When we came, he already knew what he wanted. Until a short time before that, he had spent his days, like the others, wandering from hunters to planners to makers to teachers to planters to singers, spreading his wonders and askings impartially. The others still wandered, multiply curious, questioning weavers and fishers and carpenters, healers and painters and crafters of food. It would be three or four seasons before, one by one, they singled out the preferred occupations to which they'd be bound in training at First Rites.

But Lucky already knew what he wanted. Before we came, he went, day after day, to the Shrine or the House of Shrinemen, squatting patiently in the courtyard, waiting for the chance to carry sand (for stone scrubbing) or water or polishing cloths or firewood for a Shrineman, listening in silence to such talk as was carried on in his presence, storing up questions to ask them, *hallall*, when the time should be ripe. Part of each day he sat at the feet of the Figures, self-hypnotized by gleaming amber and blue, spinning out glorious fantasies of the Rebirth.

(His own fascination with the Shrine and Shrinemen, and the weight of mystery he gave to some words and phrases—which I have tried to translate with capitals and occasional sonorous phrases in this account—led us later to a misunderstanding of some proportion. But, *hallall* . . .)

His persistence was already recognized in the village. The other children first, then his mothers and fathers, had noticed his absence from forest, fields, and shops. Then the Shrinemen began teasing him with familiar fondness at evening gatherings and restday games, so that everyone started to realize what he had chosen. And if it was something of a shock to parents and teachers, the boy did not know it.

Perhaps because we settled as close to the Shrine as we dared (just over the edge of a hill with a clear view of the courtyard be-

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tween the shrine and the House of Shrinemen), perhaps out of the same fascination with the unknown that had drawn him to the Shrine—Lucky was our first and most frequent visitor, and became, either in his own person or as interpreter, our chief source of information about both the Shrine and the islanders. He did not, at first, realize that our preoccupation with the Shrine was as great as his own; we did not share his confident artlessness in questioning-asking. I do not know just how he explained us to himself at first, or whether he even tried to. Perhaps he just waited to learn what he wanted to know—*hallall.*

IT WAS not passive waiting, anyhow. The first day, after his first attempt to speak with us, he sat in what must have been stunned bemusement for several hours, pondering the incredible fact of a second language. (We saw the squatting inward-turned boy as "a stolid impassive indigene." I blush to admit that the phrase is from my own notebook.) Then, having fully accepted that the phenomenon was not—obviously—impossible, but only previously unknown, it was he who approached us with the second overture.

We were just setting up the hand bellows for blowing foam into the camp wallforms. Lucky walked over, watched, walked away, and came back with a round stone, flattened on one side, just right to prop up the foot that kept slipping.

He held it out. We all stopped and stared. George Lazslo was quickest. He reached out and took the stone, smiling.

"Thank you," George said.

The boy touched the stone. "Sannacue?" His small brown face seemed to turn gold with the joy of his smile. "Mertz," he said, tapping the stone. "Mertz—sannacue?"

Henry started to correct him, but Jenny and I both realized at the same time that it was better to let the error ride, and not confuse the issue. (Starting as a joke, we all got to where we found *sannacue* as natural a word as *stone.*)

The principle was established, and it was astonishing to us how rapidly he learned. Jenny was our linguist, and predictably proved quicker than the rest of us in learning the island language, but when they sat exchanging names and phrases, it was she, far more often than he, who had to be told twice. Once he heard it, and was sure he understood, he simply did not know how to forget. (For her fascinating account of the process, see pp. 324-359, in "Language in the Isolated Culture," Dr. Jennifer R. Boxill, S&S, 1985.)

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As soon as the bare minimum of mutual language was effective, Lucky (again) initiated the next step in cultural exchange. He had been showing up at the camp just after breakfast each morning; this day he came an hour earlier, with a basket of woven reeds on his arm. It was my day for KP, and I was opening a can of bacon when he came up and touched my arm, showing me the basket. "Try my food?" he said.

The basket was filled with fresh steamed fish, still hot, each on its own new-baked half-loaf of native meal bread. At the bottom, five small pots of blue clay —the same stuff the Guardian Figure was molded in—held a savory vegetable sauce to be poured over fish and bread.

It was very good, but that seemed, at the time, irrelevant. The greatest significance of the gift was learning that our self-appointed guide and mascot was, it seemed, fully accredited in his friendship by the—so far—invisible parents and elders of the village.

I should say, "parents *or* elders," because we were uncertain. When we asked if he'd prepared the food himself, he laughed uproariously and then said, with ostentatious patience, "*Mothers* cook food." Whether he meant mothers as a class (and in this case *his* mother), or several women of the class, mother, we did not know.

Both assumptions were wrong, as it happened. He meant *his mothers.*

IT TOOK us most of six months, to reach a level of communication at which mistakes of this sort could be cleared up. And from that time on, it seemed as though most of our discussions consisted of substituting closer approximations for old misconceptions. The more we learned, the more complex was what we had to learn. As for Lucky's wrong assumptions about us, they took even longer for him to recognize, and more time yet for *us* to realize he'd had them. We had been on the island the best part of a year before we gained any comprehension of the extent to which our presence had affected the boy himself. And through all that time, we so carefully leaned over backwards to avoid showing special interest in the Shrine, that we had never learned of Lucky's particular infatuation with it!

All through our second season on the island (by their time reckoning), we were pumping a steady flow of information out of the boy. We learned the basic economy and social structure of the island; how to reckon seasons, and count age and status. He explained the system of edu-

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cation and apprenticeship, the courtship and marriage customs. When he did not know answers to what we asked, he would say, "*Hallall; hallall* you will know." And next day, or next week, or even next season, he would come back with the answer. Most answers, that is. Sometimes the second answer too was, "*hallall.*" But then, he would add, "*Hallall, I* shall know, and then you too."

We worried, occasionally, about what was happening to Lucky, in his own village—whether his contact with us singled him out for better or worse. What we never imagined was the delight of his parents (He had nine at the time; Dr. Henry Cogswell's article in *Anthropological Review*, II, 1983, pp. 19-26, gives a brief comprehensive analysis of island family relationships.) and teachers and the older people in general at the effect we had on him.

IN the pursuit of the knowledge we asked, Lucky had gone back to learn himself all the things he had scorned to observe before we came: Now, he watched weavers and planters and netters of fish, masons and flutists and arrowmakers, with a concentrated attention that he had reserved before only for matters concerning the Shrine. The older people watched, and were pleased. They had always thought well of the boy. He was marked as lucky from birth. When it had seemed clear he would be a Shrineman, they had been, not disappointed so much as surprised. It did not seem quite suitable for one so lavishly endowed. Now he was learning, as they had expected, all matters of concern to the people. If it were what he wished, he would of course be a Shrineman; but they began speaking of him now as a future Firstman.

The pinky strangers ("Pinkies" was what they called us.) whose advent was otherwise inexplicable and perhaps a bit disturbing, had perhaps been sent to train a leader among the people, as the people themselves had not known how to do—

So they reasoned; at the least, they decided, we *were* causing Lucky to learn what they had hoped he would, whether that was our purpose in coming or not. At the very least, it was indirectly due to us that they had made sure of his extraordinary capacities, which had been indicated as probable by various features of his birth and growth, but had never before been fully displayed. (The eidetic memory was as impressive to them as to us; and his intelligence was high, even in that high-average society. Chapter X of Dr. G. M. Lazslo's, "Environment and Intelligence," S&S, 1987, deals

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with our findings on the island, for those who are interested.)

Two of his fathers came to thank us.

It was the first visit we had from anyone but Lucky. Out of simple courtesy, no adult would have come into our camp without some such cause. Out of simple caution, we might never have entered their village without that prior visit. It was our opening contact with the group as a whole.

THE fathers were overjoyed to discover that Jennie spoke their language with some proficiency. That made it possible to dismiss Lucky, and thank us without requiring him to translate praise of himself or of his friends. We told them in return how much we admired and relied on the boy—and how very pleased we were to learn that our influence had helped him adjust to his own world, and not put him out of tune with it.

That is what we meant to say, but Jennie did not know any word in their language for "adjust" or "maladjusted." She tried "out of season," and got only smiling puzzlement. She made a long speech full of metaphor and analogy, and finally one of them said, "oklall?"

Oklall, Lucky had told us, was the opposite of *hallall*. They seemed to think we had been concerned about Lucky yesterday, but not tomorrow. We let well enough alone at that point, and offered food instead of conversation. Lucky rejoined us, and took obvious pride in piloting his fathers' way through the strange meal. When they left, we had our invitation to visit the village—paradoxical, when we thought of it, since what had occasioned the thanks-paying was our previous inability to go in person.

IF the fathers had the same thought, it would not have worried them. If we understood, as we thought we did, what *hallall* meant, we would have known they'd see no cause to worry. They had seen his potential, displayed clearly, and were naturally content to let Lallayall's nature take its own course. *Hallall*, he would learn all he needed to know. *Hallall*, he would grow to his proper adult place. If he needed help or encouragement, they would provide it. The expectations they had begun to have before his preoccupation with the Shrine, expectations based on his birth and early growth, now seemed once again probable. Perhaps, as time grew closer for a Rebirth, it was necessary for a future Firstman to know more of the Shrine than was usual. His unlikely interest in Shrinemen might then mean only that he would be Firstman

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at the time of a Rebirth. Lallayall—Lucky—indeed! He was well-called.

As for us, we were too busy and excited with our new observing privileges, and more than that, with the news of Lucky's special concern with the Shrine, to think of the oddity of that *tomorrow-yesterday*, misunderstanding. We assumed, from his fathers' manner of mentioning it, that the Shrine was not taboo in discussion. It seemed we might also hope, eventually, to be allowed to examine it in person: if a child could spend his time there freely, when his parents disapproved, it was not unreasonable to hope that visitors might be invited.

One other assumption, based on our experience of Lucky's learning powers, proved unfounded: there was almost nothing he was able to tell us about the Shrine or Shrinemen, except just such visual descriptions as we now dared to hope might be redundant. He described the Figures, the blue Guardian on the Window of Light, and the amber Lifegiver on the scroll pedestal. He painted a vivid word picture of the reptiloid grace of the Lifegiver, the menacine power of the Guardian. About the Shrinemen and their lives he knew many minute details—but none of significance. They ate thus, slept so, conversed in the courtyard; they were celibate, wore brown robes with a design patterned on the Window of Light; they had daily rituals to say; they performed certain calculations. *Hallall*, they would officiate at the Recurrence, the Rebirth.

FROM the Oldest Men in the village, of whom there were three, in their Seventh Age, we learned more—if what we learned was fact. They could all recall, in young childhood, seeing the Life of the Shrine then extant. There had been no Recurrence since then, nor had it occurred in their lives, but before they were born.

In twenty-five decades, they said, the Life would Recur. It was soon, soon . . .

And saying so, they glanced significantly at Lucky. *Hallall*, a Rebirth . . .

That word again—*hallall*. In the village and fields, we heard it incessantly. It was the only no-answer a child ever got. No question was forbidden for young ones to ask—but some were not answered in First Age, and some not in Second. *Hallall*, they were told, *hallall*, ye shall know.

"When do we plant firstseed?" a child might ask.

"In the day following the third full moon of Seedfall," he would be told.

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"Which seed is firstseed?" And he would be shown.

"What comes of it?" "When do we harvest it?" "How is it stored?" "Who plants it?" "Who knows the full moon?"

All these would be answered and fully, readily. The people would lay down their work, if need be, to go with a questioning child and show him the answer.

But—"Why does it grow?" "How does the Firstman know which round moon is the *full* moon?" or "Why do people seed themselves all year round, but fawns and fish only in Green-growth Season?"

Then the answer was always, "*Hallall*," given with a glad smile for the child who was thinking ahead of his years. First age children were to learn only what could be seen, touched, smelled, or heard. *Why* and *wherefore* were for Second Agers, the adolescent apprentices. So—

"*Hallall*, little one . . ."

IT WAS listening to the teaching of children that we finally came round to understand what the word meant. We had thought it was "tomorrow"—or "later," vaguely. Then for a while we thought it just an evasion, a sort of "I don't know either; perhaps some day we'll both find out." But what it meant, precisely, was, "In the fullness of time."

The distinction is not nearly as much in the words as in the kind of thinking that must lie behind them. Shrine Islanders, for instance, fear death less than any society known—and this with no trace of belief in discrete immortality. In the fullness of time one is born, grows and learns, loves, weds, and begets, rears children, teaches the younger ones, acquires status, grows feeble and dies. If death comes, then one's time is full.

From the answers that were and were not given youngsters in Lucky's Age Group, we also came to understand how we must have troubled him with our determined questioning about the Shrinemen. Here, too, we had progressed through a series of dead-wrong assumptions. Because Lucky told us of books and calculations, of ideographs on the Shrine (which he could reproduce flawlessly, but with no comprehension); because he had never seen books in the village, or never spoke of them; because he, the brightest of his Age group, went daily to the House of Shrinemen, we first took for granted that the Shrinemen were priestly scholars, perhaps the guardians of an ancient culture, their role symbolized by the red-maced blue Guardian Figure protecting the "Lifegiver"—a goddess, clearly, but perhaps of wisdom rather then fertility.

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The reptilian appearance suggested this strongly. Henry got very enthusiastic about the correlation of snakes and divinely protected knowledge. "Rebirth" could imply a predictable renaissance—and that suggested the ugly thought that the secrecy of the Shrinemen's rites and formulae was that of an unplanned bureaucracy perpetuating itself by withholding the knowledge it had been set up to protect and disseminate . . .

WHEN we understood what *hallall* meant, we had to revise this unhappy picture, for much of what Lucky did not know was not secret at all—just *hallall* at his age. By that time, also, we had heard from the three Oldest Men such mutually confirming details of the appearance and function of the Life of the Shrine, that the whole notion of a usurping bureaucracy became absurd. "Rebirth" was no symbol, but a literal incarnation of new wisdom, presented at intervals of roughly—by our time—eighty years. The incarnation took the form of a froglike creature at least roughly resembling the statue and relief Figures at the Shrine. (The old men recalled an identical appearance, except for color, which was grey—but they were old and remembering a strongly suggestible childhood.)

So the Shrinemen became shamans, half-ignorant half-wise witchdoctors applying without understanding some ancient formulae designed to release increments of knowledge slowly to a population reverted—for what strange intriguing reasons?—to barbarism. The near-idyllic society we saw was the planned result of this program; and the quiet patience of the *hallall* philosophy made sense now; *hallall*, all would be known. We need only wait; *hallall* . . .

But for witchdoctors, the Shrinemen were poor showmen. Neither did they do healing (any more than they governed; both of these were functions of all *other* people who lived into the Second Decade of the Sixth Age). The shaman theory began to fall apart the night George found out the man next to him at a haybringing dance was a "shaman," off duty for the party; the putative witchdoctor invited us all, very casually, to visit him at the Shrine. There had never been any taboo; no one suspected we might be interested.

WE found the Shrinemen, as we had first assumed they would be, educated and cultured, in the bookish sense, far above the level of the other islanders. They were intelligent men devoted to a faith, or more, to a

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duty. When Rebirth occurred, it was necessary that they be on hand, trained in the formulae of sacrifice. Without their precise weights and measures and chants, the Life of the Shrine would be monstrous and harmful.

The Oldest Men, we suggested, were saying it was near *hallall* for Recurrence . . . ?

The Shrinemen nodded. They brought out a register, a long papyrus-like scroll. One fourth of its length was filled with ideographs—like those on the Shrine itself, tantalizingly like, but unlike, three different ancient languages Jenny *did* know . . .

On this scroll, they said, was the listing of dates and persons connected with Shrine Life. The first entry, in barely legible, long-faded ink, went back—they said—almost 350 decades, nearly 1200 years, as we reckon. One of them spread the scroll on a lectern, and began intoning with such singsong regularity it was evident he was reciting by rote, and not actually reading.

Yet there was an air of authenticity about their list; whether it was in the scroll or not, whether they could read the symbols or not, we somehow believed that the time intervals—ranging from nineteen to thirty decades between Recurrences—were legitimate history.

The question was—history of *what?*

The answer, of course, was—*hallall.*

If our supplies lasted until the Recurrence, we'd know what it was. Not *why*, or *wherefore*, but *how* and *what*, *when* and *who*. To the Life of the Shrine, it seemed, we were all as First Agers . . .

THUS we arrived at our last misconception regarding the Shrinemen. They were—obviously—an especially non-virulent academic breed of priest, serving their temple with civilized pleasant lives devoted to learning, discussion, and ritual. *Hallall*, what they re-memorized every day would be of not just use, but great need . . .

Happily, we understood Lucky by that time at least better than we did the Shrine; as a result, we did not plague him with our latest errors—and plaguing they would have been, to say the least. Religion, as we know it, had no words in the Shrine Island language. *Sin, priest, faith, morals,* were not only, in complexity, subjects suitable only for adults—they were concepts unknown to the people. We did not intend to introduce them.

Since it would have been Lucky to whom we expressed these thoughts first, it is doubly fortunate we did not do so, for Lucky

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was lucky. From the time of his birth on, it was the outstanding trait of his young life.

In the calendar of the Shrine Islanders, there are three seasons to mark the year's circuit: first is Greengrowth, when the soil is renewed, when the creatures of forest and river renew life, a time of thriving for all young things. Then comes Ripening, when fawns, fish, and fruit come to full size and plumpness. Last, there is Seedfall, when pods and clouds burst to shower the land with the next season's new life, when bucks rage in combat throughout the forest, and such spawning fish as survived the nets of the Season of Ripening spawn by the thousands far up the river.

The calendar of events, of people's lives, is composed of these seasons, in sets of ten. Each Decade of Seasons has separate significance in the course of a lifetime. Three Decades make up an Age of Life.

It is auspicious among the people, to have Greengrowth for the ruling season of one's First Age. Lucky, born lucky in Greengrowth, would come to his First Rites, dividing childhood from apprenticeship, innocence from approaching courtship, just as the seasons changed from Greengrowth to the appropriate Ripening. Three decades later, his Full Manhood Rites would coincide with the change of the natural world from Ripening to Seedfall.

SUCH children were known to be fortunate in their growing, somehow in tune with the world more than others. In Lucky's case, each sign at every stage of development had confirmed the extraordinary augury of his birth on the first morning of a Greengrowth season. And it was for the same reason that his early interest in the Shrine had so startled his elders; a child of his sort was seldom attracted by abstraction or mental mystery; certainly, the children of Greengrowth were too much in tune with the soil to make likely celibates.

There is a certain innocence, when you think of it, implicit in the idea of luck. A truly *lucky* person has, always, a certain natural and glorious naivete—a sort of superior unconsciousness, which can do for some people, in their acts and impulses, precisely what the well-trained, reflex reactions of a star athlete do for his body. The special ability to seize the right moment with the right hand is as vulnerable to conscious thought as the act of high-jumping would be to a man who tried to think each muscle separately into action.

So it is well that we did not force on Lucky the exercise of the metaphysical part of his

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mind that his keen intelligence could never have refused, once offered.

WE had been almost five full seasons on the island, when the second ship came. Lucky, of course, with his rare instinct, was walking in the woods when it landed, not half a mile from where it came down.

Three people emerged—three more Pinkies! Rejoicing, the boy ran to greet them, one thought predominant in his young mind: here at last was the making of a Pinkie family! Seven is the minimum number of adults in an island household. We had never attempted to explain our marriage customs to him; frankly, living on the island, we had come to feel a little ashamed of confessing our one-to-one possessiveness. We had simply allowed them to keep their first misimpression that we did not have children because we were too few in number for a proper household.

With these thoughts in mind, he ran forward and greeted the strangers in clear pure English, offering to guide them immediately to our camp.

They seem to have managed a rapid recovery, when one considers the shock this must have provided. Politely, they excused themselves, and announced they had come, not to join us (whom they had never heard of, of course) but to pay their respects to the famous Shrine.

Lucky led them there. On the way, they talked pleasantly with him, pleasantly but wrongly. They did not sound like Pinkies—not like the Pinkies he knew. Vaguely, he sensed something *oklall*—unripe, green, out of place and time. Gradually, his answers to the oversweet probings of the female among them became less clear, so that by the time she asked the two crucial questions, he was almost incoherent.

They did not find out how many Pinkies were on the island nor how many others spoke English. If they had known there were only four of us, unarmed academics, and only Lucky besides ourselves who would ever know how to tell the world outside what happened, they would surely have been less precipitate. As it was, they were on edge.

HE took them directly to the Shrine Window. This in itself was odd; it was bad etiquette; he should have presented them first to the Shrinemen. But he was already acting under the impulse of that strange quality of luckiness that ruled his life.

Then he found himself staring at Lifegiver, terribly torn and uncertain, not knowing why he had done such a thing, or why he

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had spoken to them softly, in false friendship. The amber figure glowed in double light: sunlight cascading from the unroofed courtyard, and the golden glow from inside the Window.

He—I believe it was he—said later that he did what he did just because she was beautiful: a simple act of adoration. I suppose he was confused, aware of a responsibility too large for his young shoulders, and seeking guidance of some sort. That at least is more rational than the notion that he acted then out of the pure unconsciousness of his special—lucky—nature. I know, because I watched it happen, that he moved forward in an almost trancelike manner.

(Everything from the moment of the meeting in the forest up to this point I know only from having been told. What occurred in the courtyard I saw for myself. It was almost time for the Shrinemen's evening ritual, and Henry and I were on the hilltop, with binoculars, watching.)

This is what happened:—

Lallayall stepped forward and fell to his knees before the statue of the Lifegiver. He reached up, and his lanky arms were just long enough to wrap around her smooth stone legs. He gazed up at her, and then bent his head, resting it against the carvings at the top of the scroll pedestal.

At the instant of contact, the mace fell from the hands of the Blue Guardian.

The two men were fast. One jumped for the mace, one for Lucky. While the second one held the boy still, the first studied the rod and the Figure, and then reached out with the red mace and seemed to be twisting it against something on the Window. (After much discussion and examination, we came to the conclusion that it was the Guardian's eye he was twisting. The open end of the rod is exactly the shape and size of the opal eye of the Guardian.)

We did not see the Window open. It opened inwards, and our angle of vision was wrong. But we knew what was happening from the oddly expressive way the three intruders stood and stared, at the Window and at each other—questioning, triumphant, frightened, uncertain. We also saw the Shrinemen coming, a split second before the woman did. We saw her point and heard her cry faintly from down below.

The other turned to look, and all three lost their irresolution. They moved as one, taking Lucky with them. All four vanished (from our angle of view) inside the Shrine.

THE Shrinemen came to a full stop in front of the Window. Had it closed again? I looked at Henry for the first time, and

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found him turning to look at me; it suddenly occurred to us that we ought to be doing something to help.

"You stay," he said. "I'll get the others, go on down. Keep watching."

It was the sensible way to do it. We were both torn between having to see it all and the need to help. This way we did both.

I nodded, and put the glasses back to my eyes. Incredibly, the Shrinemen were arranging themselves in their evening ritual position, as calmly as though it were any sundown; they formed their semicircle in front of the window, and brought forth the shining silver-tipped quills that were their badge of office, held them up like dart-throwers, as they always did, and began their sundown chant!

Perhaps the Window had not closed before. If it had, it opened again. My first thought was that the Guardian Figure had fallen. But it was not a Figure. It was alive.

It was blue and glistening, and it sprang down to the ground, crouched, alert, so clearly menacing in its intentions it was not necessary to see the face to understand the inherent malice. It had barely touched ground when a quill—a *dart*, rather—from the first Shrineman in the semicircle caught it in the face. (The eye, I have always assumed —the same left eye that must be the key to the Shrine?)

By that time, another had leaped out—and the next dart brought it down. It went so almost-casually, so rhythmically, so soundlessly, and with such economy of motion on both sides, that it seemed unreal. There were ten of the blue things altogether; at the sixth, I took my eyes from the glasses, blinked, shook my head, and looked back, unbelieving. I saw the same thing.

But remember—I did have that moment of doubt.

WITHOUT any break in the rhythm, the eleventh figure came out of the Shrine. It was not blue, or crouching or perilous; it was brown-gold of skin, and leaped like a dancer, and as it landed the Shrinemen who still held their darts poised, dropped them, and the whole semicircle burst into a chant of tremendous, overwhelming joy and welcoming.

They faltered just once—when, still in the same timing, the twelfth creature came forth, a twin to the first gold-brown incarnation of the Lifegiver. For perhaps two beats of the song there was obvious confusion; then it rang out again, louder and more joyous.

But those who had dropped unused darts retrieved them.

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THEY finished the song, the two Lives of the Shrine standing inside their circle, apart from the heap of lifeless blue bodies. Then—the Window must have closed meantime; they clearly knew the Rebirth was completed—four of them walked to the two shining creatures, bowed to them (in the islanders' bow of courtesy—not one of reverence), and led them into the House. The others approached the dead entities, picked them up, and carried them off, around the House, out of sight.

My stage was empty. I waited till dark, but saw no more. Not till I started down to the camp did I even wonder what had become of Henry and the others, who should have had time to arrive at the scene before the chant began. I found out when they joined me a few minutes after I got back to camp: the gates of the Shrine courtyard had been closed and barred; they had knocked and called out and waited—also till dark—without answer. They had heard the chant of rejoicing; they had seen nothing.

I told them what I had seen. I told it hesitantly; I did not completely believe my own memory. When, next day, and the days after that, all our questions and probings produced only mildly stratled or baffled replies from villagers and Shrinemen alike, we decided I had been the victim of some extraordinarily powerful hypnotic illusion.

We felt fairly sure of what part of it Henry and I had seen together; and this was further supported by the presence of a strange ship in the forest, with no passengers—and by Lucky's disappearance.

We left the island a few weeks later. Our supplies might have lasted another month, but we all felt restless, and we missed Lucky, both personally and in our work. We knew there were answers we could not get from anyone, about what happened. But we saw no likelihood of getting them by staying longer. And we had to report the strange ship.

We agreed that as far as we knew—as far as four so-called scientists could claim to know anything—four people had entered the Shrine; a watcher on the hilltop (Henry's article so describes me) experienced an extraordinarily vivid hallucination or hypnotic illusion afterwards, during the ritual chant.

FOR the others, that agreement was sufficient. *They* hadn't had the "hallucination."

I went back. And of course, we had left too soon. Our questions had been, naturally, *oklall* The Life of the Shrine is never revealed until the next Rites . . .

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This time it was a tremendous revelation; never before had twin Lives occurred.

I STAYED two full seasons on the Island, that second trip. This time, I lived, in a special visitor's capacity, with Lallayall's family. I learned to speak their language much better, and I spent many hours in talk with the Shrinemen and with the Lives.

The Lives told me about Lucky's meeting with the strange Pinkies; they told me how he felt when he fell on his knees before the Lifegiver; they told me they were reborn of him in the Shrine.

They told me how it felt, but could not tell me how or why it happened. They did not know. We all speculated—the Lives, the Shrinemen, and I—on what the Shrine itself might be, and what sort of force could produce ten glistening blue demons from three evil humans, and two golden angels from one lucky boy.

With all the speculation, and all I was told, I came back with not one shred of scientific evidence that anything of the sort happened. For all I know, the Lives may still be an hypnotic illusion produced by the Shrinemen; they may be some sort of periodic mutation. They may be Lucky Reborn.

They do not know, any more than I, how the Shrine came to be there, or what happened inside a chamber which they describe only as "filled with great light."

I tried approaching the Lifegiver, as Lucky had. The Shrinemen gave full permission, clearly amused. Nothing happened, though I tried it often, with minute variations of head and hand positions.

I may have missed the exact pressure points; I may have had the wrong attitude. I believe, myself, that I simply do not have the kind of unconsciousness Lucky had.

My own tendency, also, is to believe that the Shrine is a sort of outpost of some other planet —but why this should feel any more "scientific" to me than the Shrinemen's belief in an ancient lost magic, I don't know.

The Shrinemen, by the way, are still worried over some things. The weight of the entering bodies was never ascertained, they point out. If there was unused mass left inside the Shrine, they cannot say what may come forth the next time a pure innocent embraces goodness for her own sake.

THE END

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Dr. BIRDMOUSE

By R. BRETNOR

Illustrator SUMMERS

The trouble with Vandercook was, all the girls on Eetwee looked like Miss Cowturtle when what Vandercook had in mind resembled more Miss Marilynbardot.

DR. Birdmouse needed only two weeks to learn English. He met Vandercook every morning at the door of the spaceboat, and they walked—or, at least, Vandercook walked while Dr. Birdmouse flitted and fluttered—out over the crisp bluish grass into the pink trellis-trees, where they seated themselves on pillowy vegetables called thirmlings and throgs. Vandercook liked the throgs because they didn't squeak like the thirmlings, and besides they were dry.

Of course, it wasn't really as informal as that. Vandercook didn't actually walk *on* the grass. Dr. Birdmouse's odd little friends always unrolled a splendid red carpet that stretched from the door of the spaceboat through the out-grove, through the place where the gestures were made, into the in-grove. There they brought in the big breakfast banquet, a sort of fruit-salad-Smorgasbord-vegetable-plate, and made their prettiest gestures as Vandercook ate it, keeping them up until Eetwee's twelfth moon—the quick, green one—made its third trip overhead.

Vandercook attributed all this to his own resourcefulness and quick thinking. As soon as Dr. Birdmouse had learned enough English to ask him his business, he had announced himself as Envoy Extraordinary and Ambassador Plenipotentiary from Earth to Eetwee. This ruse had made it unnecessary for him to tell Dr. Birdmouse the truth about his profession—how he travelled from planet to planet playing the piano, and how the

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light from the three romantic old curlicued oil-lamps shone on his slick, wavy hair, and his spangled tuxedo, and his red smile and white, hairy hands—and how lean, lonely young women, and hungry middleaged women, and wistful old women sat there and listened, devouring him with their moist, stupid eyes.

HE HAD a bad moment or two when Dr. Birdmouse's personality, flowering with his fluency, began to bear an uncanny resemblance to that of his own Uncle Edwin, an elderly person of indeterminate sex with enough of an income to swish around on the edge of the Arts. After Dr. Birdmouse addressed him as "*dear* boy" several times, following this up with a perfect rendition of Uncle Edwin's soprano giggle, Vandercook asked him outright, "Are you reading my mind?" And Dr. Birdmouse giggled and swished, and replied, "*Dear* silly boy, I'd just *love* to read it and know *all* the sweet things you're thinking. But I can't. We're all awfully in*tui*tive here on dear little Eetwee, but I'm just not telepathic."

Vandercook settled down on his throg, fairly certain that the sweet things in his mind were safely concealed. These concerned what he had been doing since his arrival, and his plans for the future, which he had made within fifteen minutes after landing on Eetwee. His profession was not as rewarding as it was said to have been back in the juicier days of the Twentieth Century, and he had been wanting to quit it. Besides, he was weary of ardent but unpleasing women, one at a time or by the whole hall full. He was sick and tired of the coarse jokes his fat brother, Hughie, was always cracking about them, especially in public and to his loud, red-faced friends. Hughie was a trucking contractor with a whole string of starlets and models and absolutely Grade-A nightclub strippers. Vandercook had been brooding about it. Suddenly he had made his decision, abandoned his manager-navigator, decamped with the spaceboat and proceeds. Then, promptly losing his way, he had blundered on Eetwee.

Well, pretty soon now, if he wanted, he'd be able to buy himself the world's fanciest harem. He imagined them—brunettes, blondes, and redheads, all in a sort of lush Turkish Bath setting, with Hughie drooling with envy outside the door. Boy, would that show him!

He had seen right away that Dr. Birdmouse's friends were worth money. They were worth so much money that even the spaceboat could carry enough of

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them to make him a fortune. Usually it wasn't worthwhile exhibiting extraterrestrials; they were too different. A couple of monkeys out of a zoo could steal their audience away any time. Besides, they required special atmospheres and temperatures, to say nothing of menus. But Dr. Birdmouse's friends were all oxygen breathers, and each of them looked so *almost* familiar that you could stare at it for hours just trying to figure it out. Then you'd finally conclude, as Vandercook had at first, that every one was a species all by itself.

VANDERCOOK knew that if you take a tall glass, pour in a jigger of brandy and one of tequila, and then fill it up with champagne, you get something unique. It may remind you of what has gone into it, but it has new and special characteristics all its own, and they are decidedly functional. Dr. Birdmouse was like that. At first glance, he reminded Vandercook of the pouring together of a rather large bird, perhaps of the pheasant variety, and a very large mouse —not a forced crossing, not an unnatural linking of hostile genes, but a subtle blending which itself modified the ingredients. Dr. Birdmouse was not mouse *plus* bird. He rose above that. He had neither feathers nor fur, but he had their resultant, a soft covering which, beneath its gray surface, showed the bright patterns of his ancestral plumage. He had wings which folded discreetly so as not to mar his mousely appearance after he landed. He had a little, dark nose-beak which wiggled, hands fore and aft, and a parasol-fan at the end of his tail which he used as a stabilizer. He was Dr. Birdmouse, and nobody else. And in this single respect, of their utter uniqueness, all his friends were just like him.

As soon as he could, Vandercook had asked why this was. "Where is the rest of each species?" he asked. "Why is it I've seen only one of a kind?"

"Species? The rest?" Dr. Birdmouse looked startled.

"Sure," Vandercook said. "All the critters who're just like each other, all the bears or tigers or horses or owls, all the—well, all the *birdmice*."

"You mean—" Dr. Birdmouse suddenly became very excited. "—you mean that you still have *species* on Earth?"

"Why, naturally," Vandercook answered.

"Gracious me! And—and they *aren't* interfertile?"

A great light burst on Vandercook. Taken a bit by surprise, he glanced quickly around at Dr. Birdmouse's friends, and gaped, and shook his head mutely.

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"Dear me, dear me!" Dr. Birdmouse fluttered and swished, and jumped up and down on his thirmling. Then he calmed down a little, and patted Vandercook's knee. "You poor, *poor* creature," he murmured. "How *dull* for you, dear boy."

AFTER that, Dr. Birdmouse asked a great many questions; and Vandercook told him as much as he thought he could safely impart about reproduction on Earth, being very careful, of course, to avoid hurting his feelings.

When he had finished, Dr. Birdmouse did his best to console him. "You must try not to mind *very* much," he said gently, "because someday I'm sure you'll be civilized too. *We* were primitive once, before sweet Mr. Gibbon went into business. We had all *kinds* of species, reproducing themselves for no reason at *all*."

Vandercook asked him who sweet Mr. Gibbon had been, and Dr. Birdmouse immediately gestured at one of his friends, who handed over a heavy brown pouch he was carrying. From it, Dr. Birdmouse removed a fine three-dimensional likeness, cased in plastic, of what appeared to be a soberly spectacled, portly, striped ape with a vividly purple behind.

"Gibbon's as close as your language can come to his name," Dr. Birdmouse declared. "He accomplished all *sorts* of wonderful things, but the most marvelous of all were his medicines. The first one was called *Mr. Gibbon's Mental Invigorator*, and he sold it in the *dearest* little square blue bottles, and the other gibbons bought it *all* up, and they gave it to *everyone* else to see what would happen. What happened, of course, was that pretty soon the gibbons weren't the *only* intelligent, civilized species any more, because all the rest were as clever as they were. The lions and tigers and things stopped killing and eating their new little friends, and became civil en*gineers*, and vio*lin*ists, and in*sur*ance adjusters, and took Ph.D.'s in the most interesting subjects. Everyone was *so* happy, dear boy."

For a moment, Vandercook toyed with the notion of getting a few hundred gallons of the Mental Invigorator, and giving it to the lions and tigers and things back on Earth, and, with their aid, taking over as dictator. Then he recalled that, on Eetwee, it had succeeded only in converting them all into pacifists, and he rather reluctantly went back to his more modest original plan.

"But they weren't *half* as happy as they were later *on*," Dr. Birdmouse continued, "because it was then that *Mr. Gibbon's Genetic Catalyst* came on the

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market. It was flavored with *licorice*, and was *ever* so tasty, and it came in cute little square *green* bottles with a picture of dear Mr. Gibbon on the label, so naturally everyone bought it. But the best thing about it was that it made all the species inter*fer*tile right then and there."

"*All?*" interrupted Vandercook, still slightly incredulous.

"All but the *fish*es, dear boy—and *they* wouldn't have been any fun. It works on the genes and the chromosomes and things so that they sort of *alter* each other, and adapt, and only the *love*liest characteristics show up, and everything works out simply beautifully no matter *how* different we are. Nowadays, of course, the species are com*plete*ly mixed up, but still every new person who's born has what we call *dominants*—two of them, like bird/mouse, for example—and these keep us reminded of the bad, bad old days. It's all so ar*tis*tic! Here on Eetwee, dear boy, the *last* thing we'd do would be separate the sheep from the goats. And it's here—" Dr. Birdmouse giggled and winked. "—that the lion *really* lies down with the lamb. Yes, *indeed*."

VANDERCOOK began to see the full implications of Mr. Gibbon's design for living. Even he was appalled. "But that isn't possible!" he exclaimed. "I mean—after all—just the *mechanical* problems—"

Dr. Birdmouse assured him that there had been no problems at all. "Mr. Gibbon's Mental Invigorator made us all *very* clever," he said simply; and then, before Vandercook could pursue the subject, he dropped it with the promise that they'd go into details later. "But first, *dear* boy—" He beckoned to three of his friends, who came up, walking and slithering and hopping, and seated themselves. "—I want you to meet our young Mr. Snakepig—such a sweet, *sen*sitive person! He was shown in the National Academy, where he won a *first* prize. And this is Dr. Leopardsheep, who arranged him, and dear Miss Moosevulture—isn't she *splendid?* a remarkable specimen—who helped make the arrangement. She's Mrs. Leopardsheep now—"

Young Mr. Snakepig coiled his tail in embarrassment; Dr. Leopardsheep looked stolidly proud, and his consort quite monstrously coy. And Vandercook, looking at the arrangement, saw that, while snake/pig were clearly the dominents, it was possible to detect echoes and overtones of leopard/sheep here and moose/vulture there. He realized, too, that the Art of Genetic Arrangement on Eetwee was like Flower Arrangement in Japan, only more so. He therefore politely re-

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marked that Mr. Snakepig was a real masterpiece, that the geniuses who had conceived him deserved everyone's compliments, and that he was delighted to meet them.

Dr. Birdmouse repeated all this in translation, and his listeners were obviously pleased. The arrangement squirmed. The geniuses snickered and shuffled their feet. Then they all started talking at once.

"They're simply *charmed*, dear boy," Dr. Birdmouse declared, "and they're sure you've made all sorts of de*light*ful arrangements back on your own little planet, and they want you to tell them *just* how you did it, and how many *prizes* they won."

Most of Vandercook's brief affairs had been business transactions with well-heeled admirers who—he shuddered whenever he thought of it—invariably tried either to marry him or adopt him. Even when he had stayed around long enough to find out, there had never been any little arrangements. However, he slyly decided not to mention this to his listeners, and laid claim to some dozens of offspring. These, he boasted, had won all sorts of prizes, and it was on the tip of his tongue to declare that several of them had become eagle scouts, but he decided that the term might too easily be misinterpreted. All his children, he said, were handsome, healthy, and normal. At this, Miss Moosevulture wanted to know what *normal* might mean; and, when Dr. Birdmouse informed her, she asked him to convey her sincerest condolences to their unfortunate visitor.

VANDERCOOK looked at the three of them, and pictured the customers drawn up in long, profitable lines in front of the boxoffice. These Eetweeans, he reflected, were smart cookies; there'd have to be a bit of lobotomy to take care of that . . . Then he thanked Miss Moosevulture very courteously, and said that he was only too well aware of how dull life was on Earth, making the same old arrangements year after year. He explained that this was inevitable, because Man was superior to all the lower animals—present company excepted, of course. Still, he thought the two cultures could learn a great deal from each other; and that, he said, was why Earth had sent him to Eetwee—to invite an Eetweean Cultural Mission to return with him for a long pleasant visit. He suggested that perhaps Dr. Birdmouse, and his three friends, and about eight or ten others would be about right for a starter.

Dr. Birdmouse seemed to have some difficulty translating his remarks, and the reason became

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obvious when he had finished. They all burst out laughing. Dr. Birdmouse hopped up and down. Young Mr. Snakepig coiled and squirmed. Dr. Leopardsheep and Miss Moosevulture rocked back and forth on their thirmlings.

"You dear, foolish, *sweet* boy!" gasped Dr. Birdmouse, when he had recovered enough to get a few words out. "Imagine us going to Earth! Whatever for? We have *so* much fun *here*."

Vandercook controlled his impatience as well as he could. He spent a great deal of his time imagining how, in the midst of the ripest young women imaginable, he would be able to sneer, not only at Hughie and all his loud friends, but at his erstwhile patrons, plastered and dyed, ravenous, tearful, and wilted. These day-dreams made him feel very masculine.

The rest of his time was devoted to long conversations with Dr. Birdmouse, and to keeping up with the Eetweean social swim—an expression which he only once had to take literally, when he was invited to dinner by an old Mr. Gullporpoise.

The conversations annoyed Dr. Birdmouse. He found Vandercook's descriptions of the life of an Ambassador Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary simply ridiculous. For the life of him, he said peevishly, he couldn't see how it left *any* time for artistic activities. It was completely unnatural.

And Vandercook answered that the reason it all seemed so strange to his host was that he was a man, not a birdmouse, and hadn't had the benefit of Mr. Gibbon's Mental Invigorator—and anyhow time was short, and he had to get home, and wouldn't Dr. Birdmouse and his friends please do Earth a big favor and agree to go with him?

Then Dr. Birdmouse would tell him all over again that there simply was no incentive, that they didn't want to learn about Ezra Pound's poetry, or nuclear fission, or *The Pines of Rome*, or even the comic book version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, because none of these, though probably worthy enough in themselves, had any bearing on making little arrangements.

Always, if Vandercook started to argue, it would be time for a banquet, or a gesture-parade; and Dr. Birdmouse would tell him never to mind, that it would all work out for the best because Eetwee was *really* the best of all possible worlds.

THERE were five banquets a day in the in-grove, and interminable rituals in the place where the gestures were made, and picnic-snacks in the out-grove between meals. There were visits to nearby cities, and lei-

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surely strolls down their soft, latticed streets where, in the shade-squares, green spiders waved their slow fronds. And then there were tours of the art galleries and museums, which might have been more amusing if Dr. Birdmouse hadn't insisted on introducing him to all the exhibits, and forcing him, in his role of ambassador, to invent one banal compliment after another.

Vandercook's existence began to get pretty wearing. He taxed his ingenuity to think up new arguments for a Cultural Mission, and got nowhere at all. Then, in the hope that the Mental Invigorator might sharpen him up, he began to hint more and more broadly that a shot of it would be welcome. His hints were ignored. Finally, during a party at Dr. Birdmouse's house, he located it in its little blue bottle on a shelf in the bathroom, right under the wall-tub, and swallowed it at a gulp. Next day he found himself able to fix a badly jammed zipper—a problem which had always defeated him in the past—with no trouble at all. Otherwise, it didn't seem to make any difference, and he felt quite discouraged.

He became irritable and impatient, and began to look haggard; and Dr. Birdmouse made it much worse by worrying about him. He took to fluttering sympathetically over his shoulder, regarding him oddly, and saying, "Are you *well*, dear boy? Are you sure you're perfectly *happy?* There aren't any bad little *troubles* you'd like to *tell* me about?"

For a while, getting desperate, Vandercook considered delivering an ultimatum: send the Mission or be attacked by a space fleet with the most modern weapons. Something, however—perhaps Mr. Gibbon's Mental Invigorator—made him suspect that they would not be impressed. He settled instead on an ultimatum of a less violent nature.

"I'll be leaving this Tuesday," he casually told Dr. Birdmouse. "I hope that by then some of you do decide to come with me. But whether you do or you don't, it's my turn to throw *you* a party—just you, and President Bearpossum and his family, and a few intimate friends, Mr. Snakepig and his mother and father, you know. It'll be on my boat a few hours before I take off, and I'll serve mushrooms and artichoke hearts, and champagne, and those nice chocolate creams."

Naturally, he said nothing whatever about locking them into the hold and then pumping in a good, strong anesthetic; but Dr. Birdmouse went into a tizzy nevertheless. "Dear, *dear* boy!" he said shrilly. "You can't really *mean* that—not before we've

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even made up our *minds*. You've been *such* a problem; we've been thinking you *over*, and *talk*ing about you. And we do want to do the *right* thing, dear boy. We want to be sure you're *happy*. So please won't you *wait* a few days? I want you to have a long, cozy chat with Miss Cowturtle first. She's as *sweet* as can be, and she understands *all* these problems—"

AFTER fifteen minutes of this, Vandercook agreed to have the chat with Miss Cowturtle, and said he'd defer his departure until Thursday evening. Beyond that he wouldn't give in.

"You've *changed*, dear boy," Dr. Birdmouse said sadly. "I don't suppose anyone gave you just a *wee* drappie of Mental Invigorator, did they? Darling Miss Moosevulture or someone like that?"

Vandercook chuckled, and told him about the episode in his bathroom, and apologized, and said he guessed he'd just been a bit thirsty.

And Dr. Birdmouse flicked the perspiration from his sharp little tongue, and said, "*Good*ness gracious! Imagine drinking that up *all* at once. And you *didn't* dissolve! I'm so relieved, dear boy."

For a few minutes, Vandercook felt decidedly shaken; apparently the unsupervised use of Mr. Gibbon's elixirs had its perils. Then he manfully put such worries behind him, and concentrated on the carrying out of his plan. For the time being, this consisted of humoring the Eetweeans, and of keeping them as unsuspecting as possible.

HE had a long very dull chat with Miss Cowturtle. Dr. Birdmouse had taught her some English, and she asked him a great many questions in a dim, mooing voice, about his career, and if he felt really *adjusted*, and why Earth sent ambassadors out kitting around when they could have been much more useful making arrangements at home. He replied very cleverly, repeating his story with only slight variations; and he didn't allow himself to show any annoyance at Miss Cowturtle's unpleasant habit of retracting her horns and pulling her head back into her shell whenever she had to take notes. Whenever she did it, he simply thought of the starlets and models, and how jealous Hughie would be.

After that, he diplomatically accepted the President's invitation to spend his remaining few days with the Bearpossums at the Executive Mansion. He walked into the city with Dr. Birdmouse and young Mr. Snakepig. Though it lay even further from the groves than the spaceboat, the red carpets were spread

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every inch of the way, and even more Eetweeans were making gestures than usual. The four days that followed seemed endless. Sometimes he would corner the President, or one of the Ministers, or Dr. Birdmouse himself, and ask whether they had reached a decision; and they always said they were ever so sorry, but they hadn't had time, and there was a banquet just starting next door, and wouldn't he like to come over?

VANDERCOOK put on nine pounds. He was almost ready to burst when, after the third banquet on Thursday, President Bearpossum shook his hand at the door, and said how nice it had been to have him there as a house-guest—no trouble at all—and assured him that they'd all be delighted to come to any party he wanted to give, any time, and patted his back, and whispered that Dr. Birdmouse had something delightful to tell him about what they'd decided.

He was in very high spirits as he and the Doctor made their way back over the splendid red carpets. He stayed in high spirits even though the Doctor kept giggling and wouldn't tell him a thing except, "It's a *lovely* surprise—just too, too lovely for words."

They came to the in-grove, to the corner where the trellis-trees opened out on the clearing. "You *must* close your eyes, dear boy," Dr. Birdmouse declared. "That'll be *half* the fun."

Vandercook closed his eyes, expecting in a moment to see Dr. Birdmouse's friends—either as a Cultural Mission with their suitcases packed or as an eager little partying group. He didn't care which. Then Dr. Birdmouse led him around the corner and several feet forward. He opened his eyes—

"*There!*" Dr. Birdmouse exclaimed. "Isn't it *dar*ling? We've *built* you a *house!*"

VANDERCOOK stared. The Cultural Mission was nowhere in sight Before him he saw a round metal house like a very fat toadstool, with an outrigger porch and some round porthole windows. As Dr. Birdmouse guided him forward, he had a horrible feeling that somewhere he'd seen it before.

"Wh-where did you g-get it?" he gasped. "Th-that *metal?*"

"Out of your *nasty* old spaceboat," replied Dr. Birdmouse with pride. "We melted it down. We were sure you wouldn't *mind*, dear boy."

Vandercook followed him in through the door. He looked around at the spaceboat's tables and chairs, and at new pieces of furniture contrived from its once-working parts. He looked

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at his chrome-and-gold-plated piano, with the glamorous old-fashioned oil-lamps on it. Dr. Leopardsheep, Miss Moosevulture, and young Mr. Snakepig were all waiting there, wearing the self-satisfied expressions typical of all welcoming committees.

"My G-God!" Vandercook croaked. "I—I'm *marooned!*"

"*Dear* boy," Dr. Birdmouse exclaimed. "How *clever* you are. You hit the sweet little nail *right* on the head!"

EVERYONE but Vandercook seemed tremendously pleased. All at once, the enormity of what had occurred burst on him. The light-years between Earth and Eetwee, instead of being just a short three-weeks hop, stretched out to their full awful length. The prospect of easy wealth from the sale of Dr. Birdmouse's friends vanished in desolate, cold darkness. So did the ladies who had been going to impress Hughie.

It was too much. Ranting and raving, Vandercook stamped up and down. Waving his plump, hirsute hands, he threatened destruction to Eetwee and all its inhabitants. He used impolite terms to describe Dr. Birdmouse and all other Eetweeans, and spoke very unpleasantly about how superior Man was to the whole brute creation, of which, despite their intelligence, they were a part.

Dr. Birdmouse and his friends didn't interrupt him at all. Once, Dr. Birdmouse remarked, "*Poor* lad, he's de*lir*ious with joy," *sotto voice;* and Dr. Leopardsheep whispered something to his wife about ". . . sedatives?" But otherwise they said nothing until he ran down.

This happened quite suddenly. One moment he was getting all set to commit personel violence; the next, he had realized that, even though they were pacifists, Dr. Leopardsheep and Miss Moosevulture and young Mr. Snakepig were either horrifyingly fanged, impressively hoofed, or frighteningly muscled. He sat down abruptly.

Instantly, Miss Moosevulture came to him and began stroking his hand. Dr. Leopardsheep hemmed and hawed sympathetically. Dr. Birdmouse fluttered and swished, and said, "*Dear,* dear boy. It's *all* for the best. We've discussed and dis*cussed* you, and we're doing just the right thing."

He went on to explain that they had taken a liking to Vandercook the moment they saw him, but that for a long time they hadn't been sure whether they ought to keep him on Eetwee. They could tell that he was an artist at heart, and that he hadn't been happy moving from

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world to world all the time—but still there was his career, and he seemed always so anxious to start off again. It was a real puzzle. The best minds on Eetwee had wrestled with it day and night.

"And you'll just *never* guess," Dr. Birdmouse said with a giggle, "what a *silly* thing I suggested at first. I thought that you *liked* diplomacy and skipping from planet to planet—just imagine! I really should have guessed right away that you hated it all, and that you really wanted to settle down somewhere and make all sorts of *ducky* arrangements—"

THE thought of ducky arrangements evoked a sharp mental picture. Vandercook shivered. "What do you know about it?" he said rudely. "Next you'll be telling me that you *can* read my mind!"

"Dear me, no," Dr. Birdmouse replied. "*I* can't—but Miss Cowturtle can. Bless her soul! such a *nice* person—she was really quite good at it too, considering how strange it was to her. She got several glimpses of some plans you were making. They were *awfully* romantic, but somehow you didn't seem to be really *too* happy about them. I mean, you didn't seem awfully *ar*dent. But she understood why with the first little peek: whoever it was you were thinking of seemed so *dowdy* and *plain*. And then—well, she found out how badly you wanted to take some of us with you, and she got the feeling that you valued us *very* highly. We were *so* touched, dear boy. After that, President Bearpossum and Dr. Leopardsheep and young Mr. Snakepig and I all agreed that you were torn between love and duty, and that what you *really* wanted deep down inside was to stay here on *dear* little Eetwee—"

There was a small, timid knock on the door, and Dr. Birdmouse called out, "Come *i-in*," and Miss Cowturtle entered.

Vandercook regarded her with frank loathing. "You mean that thing read my mind?" he demanded. "That—that goddam cowturtle freak?"

"Oh, she isn't Miss Cowturtle any more," Dr. Birdmouse put in. "She's Mrs. Vandercook now."

"SHE'S WHAT?" Vandercook screamed.

"*Mrs.* Vandercook," Dr. Birdmouse repeated. "You can make your arrangements together. Won't that be *nice?*"

Vandercook looked around for an exit. There was only one, and Dr. Leopardsheep was showing his teeth right beside it. He thought of the good old days, and the rows and rows of sweet, lean young women, and sweet,

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panting middleaged women, and darling, wistful old women all eating him up with their lovely moist eyes. He burst into tears.

At once, Dr. Birdmouse and young Mr. Snakepig helped him into a chair. "You don't *have* to take on so, dear boy," said the Doctor. "I know it's wonderful, *won*derful news, but you musn't let it affect you so *much*. After all, we did bring you to the honeymoon-groves *every* day, over the proper red *car*pets, and with all the best men and bridesmaids making their *love*liest gestures, and we did build your house right here in the *middle* to prepare you psychologically. We even saved your piano out for you. And now, dear boy—" He held out a small cordial. "—just drink this and you'll feel *so* much better."

Blindly, Vandercook reached for the glass.

"Down the hatch," remarked young Mr. Snakepig.

Vandercook swallowed it all, felt instantly better, and realized a little too late that it was flavored with licorice.

MISS Moosevulture clapped her wing-hands. "There!" she cried out delightedly. "I *told* you he wouldn't dissolve! I was sure all that was nonsense about Man being different.

"I'm *so* glad," mooed Miss Cowturtle ardently.

"This is splendid," declared Dr. Leopardsheep. "For the first time in hundreds of years we have an entirely new species to work with. Mr. Vandercook, you will go down in history."

Vandercook saw the future in its full four dimensions—and found all of them utterly hideous. He showed the whites of his eyes, and pointed a palsied finger at Miss Cowturtle. *"No, no, n-n-no!"* he gibbered. "I c-c-can't be stuck here with *that!*"

Dr. Birdmouse laughed gently. "You won't be, dear boy. *"We* understand you better than that. After all, this sweet person—" He bowed. "—saw that your being an ambassador was just sub*lima*tion, and that really you wanted to spend the rest of your life flitting from one little mate to another like a *dear* little bee. Miss Cowturtle is just the *first*. Look out of the window.

Vandercook turned his head like a robot. Outside, at the door, they were patiently waiting—Miss Camelbat and Hiss Hippogiraffe, Miss Goosemonkey and funny little Miss Frogterrier, Miss Yakpigeon and Miss Sealweasel and the fat, elderly Widow Horserabbit, and all their *nice* friends. The line ran from the door, through the place where the gestures were made, and the out-grove, all the way to the patch where the spaceboat had been.

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Slowly, through his despair, Vandercook realized that they looked awfully familiar. Slowly, he began to feel strangely comforted.

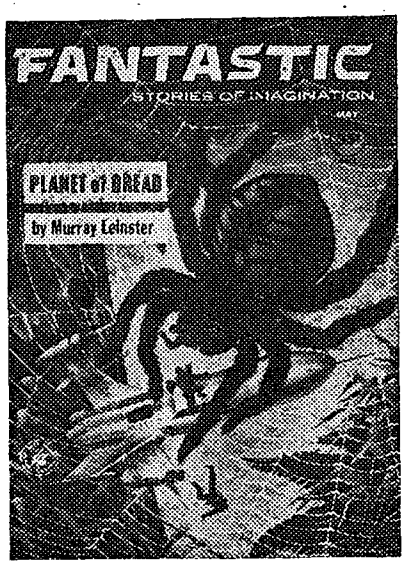
He sobbed only once more. Then he went to the piano, and turned on his famous, soft smile, and—never taking his eyes from the ladies—began the *Moonlight Sonata.*

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

Murray Leinster returns in the May issue of FANTASTIC.

In the tradition of the Red Dust series he brings us a bang-up story of action adventure on a world such as even hardened spacemen might conjure up only in nightmares: *Planet of Dread* will leave you limp with excitment.



Heading a list of novelets and short stories in May will be a penetrating fantasy of man's future—*Ripeness Is All,* by **Jesse Roarke;** and a science-fantasy belly-laugh by **Jack Sharkey**—*Double Or Nothing* —which involves such everyday incidents as 50,000 batches of cornflakes dumped from the sky.

PLUS: all our regular features. May FANTASTIC will be on sale at your newsstand April 9. Be sure to reserve your copy now.

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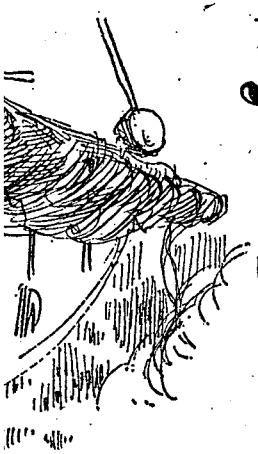

JOYLEG

(Conclusion)

By WARD MOORE and AVRAM DAVIDSON

Illustrator SUMMERS

SYNOPSIS

DURING a subcommittee session in the U.S. House of Representatives attention is focused on a file from the Veteran's Administration stating that Isachar Z. Joyleg, Rabbit Notch (care of Sevier Post Office), Tennessee is receiving a pension of $11.00 per month. Two Representatives present are particularly interested in this revelation: Lucinda Rose Habersham (R., Tenn.) and Tully Weathernox (D., Tenn.), Congressman from the district adjoining Mrs. Habersham's.

Weathernox is appalled at the paucity of the sum. Lucinda is angered that there is any pension at all, especially since there is no mention of any service-connected disability and no war period is specified. She immediately sets out to expose this defrauding of the treasury permitted under Democratic control. Weathernox, on the other hand, is convinced that the Joyleg affair will bring to light the heartlessness of the Republican administration.

Research can turn up no record of Joyleg, even as far back as the Civil War. The records exhausted, there remains one source—a trip to Rabbit Notch. Having reached this decision independently, Habersham and Weathernox are surprised and annoyed to meet in Washington's Union Station. Getting to Rabbit Notch is an exhausting project. There is no road indicated on any map. Because Joyleg receives his mail in Sevier, they head there first. The trip in-

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volves riding in decadent trains and antique coaches, and in steam-driven autos through towns without roads. From Sevier by donkey to Rabbit Notch.

It is as if the last 200 years had never existed; all trace of the 20th Century has yielded to early American farm life. When the Congressmen came in sight of their goal, they agree caution is called for; by any standards Joyleg has to be a very old man. They enter a large log cabin; the figure seated in a chair by the fireplace is a feeble, shrunken, wrinkled, white-haired man.

Once Weathernox confirms that this is Isachar Joyleg, he extolls him as a survivor of the Civil War. The old man is unable to grasp this; he seems incoherent. His housekeeper comes into the room and explains that she must take the old man away, but promises to bring him back after his soak.

Following his return the change in Joyleg's reflexes is phenomenal. His vituperous welcome is roared in a language reminiscent of the Spirit of '76. That was his world, his life and his war. George Washington, John Paul Jones, Davy Crockett were the men with whom he fought and lived. Lucinda and Tully stare wide-eyed at the living proof of an improbable fact.

Weathernox is all for taking him back to Washington, but Joyleg will have none of it; Lucinda cannot bear the thought of the exploitation that the old boy would suffer at the hands of psychiatrists, gerontologists and the like.

XI: CLAMORMENT . . .

THE CONTENTED look vanished abruptly from Martha Forsh's face. "I . . . I believe I'll lie down," she muttered. "My cold seems to be making me . . . making me lightheaded. Must have a fever."

"Poor dear," said Lucinda, putting a cool hand on Martha's forehead. "No, you haven't a fever. It's the whiskey, and no wonder. Still, it does seem to have been good for your cold."

"Good for man and beast," cackled Joyleg. "Cures what ails you, if you haven't got it, 'twill give it to you."

"It seems to have worked well for you," said Weathernox.

"That it has. Never a consumption, catarrh of the bones, not yet a flux, an apoplexy nor an ague."

"You think it's entirely due to your drinking moo—whiskey?"

"Drink it? Who said aught of drinking it? Hain't been able to stomach anything stronger than syllabub since the winter of Ninety and Nine (or was it Eighteen and Ten?), gives me the dispepsia, though I can chaw on bear-brawn or buffalo hump

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(not seen hardly hide nor hair of the creatures since the National Road was put through) with the best of them since me fourth teeth come in."

"Your what?" Tully appeared only mildly surprised by this latest wonder.

"Me fourth set of teeth." He lifted his lips to show yellow rows clearly unindebted to dental mechanics. "After I lost the last of the second crop—about the time Jemmy Monroe bought the Floridas (and a poor bargain they was)—I reckoned to get meself carved chompers, but spit me like a chicken if me gums didn't start itching and the tushes come through." He added reflectively, "but the dyspepsia was still there. Same thing happened thirty-forty years on—bout the time of the comet."

"I'm completely confused," confessed Lucinda. "If you don't drink the whiskey, how do you use it?"

"Soak in it, girl, soak in it. Two mortal hours a day, or else four every other day, more or less according to the season and me state of health. Not the stuff in the barrel, mind; the first distillation, afore the spring water has lost all its natural endowments. Not that the force is all within the water; I've tried that. It must be used while virginal, afore the power of the air has begun to age it.

I WAS an ailing child. Mother had died of the milk-sick, which might have somewhat to do with it. Father had his still, like all farmers, and one day after he'd barreled the run I was clambering about. The lid of the butt was loose, and in I fell. 'Twas some hours before I was missed and pulled out, and bless ye, I was hearty and sound and piping loud for victuals—me, that never had appetite to speak on. From that time whenever I was took poorly, he'd run a batch through the worm and have me soak. After I left home and traveled wide and far, I wasn't able to do it, but 'twas no matter, being of rugged constitution by then. 'Twas not till after I'd lived in the Notch a parcel of years and begun to be troubled with rheumatism and me old wound—getting to be a little deef I was too, and not seeing well—that I took it up again. And it serves me well, though perhaps not so good in the winters, when 'tis my conviction the melting snows dilute the virtue of the spring. And they tell me that some days I'm took bad before me soak, but I remember none f that afterward. At any rate, I didn't die. No . . . I didn't die. . ."

He got up then, muttering an excuse, and left the room. Lucinda looked at Tully. "You do believe him now?" she asked.

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He nodded. "Yes. Perhaps not as firmly as when he's speaking but—well, yes—I believe him. However the thing will be to get others, those to whom he hasn't spoken directly, to believe him. And once the matter of increasing his pension is raised the story will have to come out. The world will be incredulous, just as I was."

"Ah," said Lucinda. "But you had an open mind from the beginning; I wasn't even willing to believe he was in the Civil War. It's clear now that when the effect of soaking in this—this magic mash—wears off that he's like he was when we first saw him, weak and feeble and dull. I don't want him to be like that again, Tully; I want him to be clear and vigorous. We can't let them put him in a hospital; by the time they finally decide that there's therapy in his soaking he may be—may be . . . It may be too late."

"If they want to examine him they'll have to come here," he agreed.

"Tully, must we break this story at all?"

"What do you mean? How on earth can anything be done for him otherwise?"

"That's the point—is it worth it to him? Agreed that eleven dollars a month is ridiculous. Monstrous. Still, he's happy. And he certainly isn't starving or neglected. You know what publicity can mean—poking and prying, curiosity and ridicule, doubt and amazement, as though he were a mummy, not a living man. Need we expose him to that?"

"Just go away and forget it all?" He considered the possibility, then shook his head. "No, Lucinda, even if it would work, if everyone kept quiet and no one knew we had come here and why, it wouldn't be right. Joyleg is a hardy old warrior; he can stand the glare of publicity. We owe it to him to let the world acclaim him for his service—not just America, but the whole world. Think of the effect the discovery will have. Joyleg isn't only a living monument, he's the answer to the criticisms, the charges that we've grown old, tired, decadent, anti-revolutionary. Could we have a more fitting personification of American vigor, American courage, American vision than a United States marine from the fighting top of the *Bonhomme Richard?*"

He's right, thought Lucinda, rhetoric or no rhetoric (poor dear, he cannot help it), he's right.

THEY dispatched Gustus Praseworthy with the later-to-be-famous telegram. They also ordered from Blountsburg, through MacCray, a portable ra-

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dio, with an extra set of batteries.

Joyleg watched the unwrapping of the radio with interest. What would be his reaction, wondered Lucinda, as Tully explained the invention as best he could, turning the dials till a voice came in clearly, "—ember, friends, if you're troubled with sour stomach, indigestion or irregularity, Chew-a-choc's the remedy for you. Chew-a-choc's delightful flavor and gentle action—"

"Aye," said Joyleg, when Tully shut it off. "A notable advance. 'Tis evidently based on the French telegraph that used to flash messages from Toulon to Paris on sunny days."

"Wasn't that a heliograph?" asked Tully. "The radio sends impulses by means of electricity."

"Dr. Franklin's discovery. So they put the two together. Truly, as Scripture says, there's no new thing under the sun."

If Lucinda had expected an immediate release of Joyleg's story, she was disappointed. The newscasts told of a filibuster in the Senate and a log-jam of bills in the House. The President was taking a vacation.

"Do you suppose they are suppressing . . . ?" wondered Lucinda.

"Just investigating," said Tully. "How can you suppress a report by two members of Congress?"

"They don't know," insisted Martha. "Nobody knows. The telegram was never sent. We'll spend the rest of our lives in Rabbit Notch."

At that moment Jill Brittin arrived.

SHE came as they had, donkey-back, led by an extremely unsettled-looking Praseworthy. "Oh, hi," she greeted them distractedly. "Well, where is he? Lead me to your antediluvian man. Can he talk? I suppose not; Washington was bad enough but at least it was better than being shunted here to cover old Pegleg who's probably forgotten all about the birds and the bees. That is, if he's as old as you say—"

Tully interrupted, "Then our telegram wasn't just filed and forgotten—"

"Forgotten, hell! They practically had to call out the paratroopers to keep the AP and UPI from splashing it all over. The Veterans' Administration has requisitioned all the aspirin every government agency has inventoried and there's a thriving market in tranquilizers and barbiturates. Fortunately someone heard I was a close friend of you both. Fortunately! What am I saying? Anyway, here I am, accredited by everyone from *Time*

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and *Life* to the *Virginia Quarterly* and *Our Sunday Visitor*—by the way, has the copter dropped my equipment yet? And for God's sake, what's the chance of getting a drink around here?"

Joyleg had had his daily soak—actually, he hardly seemed to need it since their arrival, for the stimulation of their presence kept him at his alert best—and so they took her to him immediately. Lucinda was quite put out at the correspondent's assumption of close friendship and outraged at—at what? Something . . .

"A pleasure, Ma'm. So you be a scrivener for the public prints, hay? Do ye do pamphlets as well, or mayhap a tale now and again like Mistress Fanny Burney or Mrs. Centlivre?"

"Oh, we're much more specialized nowadays. I'm a newspaperwoman pure and simple."

The old man drew his heavy eyebrows together. "Pure you may be, M'am—" he bowed and smiled in a manner he had never used toward Lucinda and which she found thoroughly out of taste and not at all in character, as she had conceived Joyleg's character, "—but simple I'll warrant you're not."

Jill opened her eyes wide. "You know," she confided huskily, "I believe I'm going to like you. Two hundred? Why you're just in the prime of life."

"'Tis merry converse that thwarts dotage, M'am; I've languished for years for the lack of wit and persiflage. An I exchange quips with you long enough I'm like to be a colt again."

"I'd never keep up with you if you were any younger." She smiled, rolled her eyes and exclaimed, "Do I smell something drinkable? Oh, you absolutely marvelous man! I'm perishing of thirst."

ARE ye now? 'Twould be a misfortunate end indeed, and one we must circumvent. Will ye have a sup of our corn squeezings? Or would you prefer some hard cider, applejack, or grape wine?"

"You're well stocked, aren't you? Don't happen to have a little vermouth and gin around do you? You can skip the vermouth if it isn't handy."

"Bermoothes? Some foreign tipple I don't recollect. Nay, we have it not. In my estimate, unfit for gentle gullets. I fear I've none to offer you."

"Try the whisky, Jill," advised Weathernox. "You'll never hanker after martinis again."

"Oh God," moaned Jill; "I was weaned on whisky. It always reminds me of milk." She took the pewter mug from Joyleg's hand and sipped. "Why, it's marvelous! Bottoms up, cheerio and so

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on." She drained the mug in short order. "I hope to savor this stuff when I have more time. Right now I'm supposed to be signalling the copter. I don't want all that equipment dumped in the gully."

"Gap," corrected Joyleg. After Jill was gone, and Weathernox gallantly with her, Lucinda turned on the old man. "How can you be so blind?"

"Ay, Ma'm? Blind is it?"

"You know very well what I mean. Why you were actually flirting with that woman."

Joyleg settled himself comfortably. "Now lass, don't take on. Ye'll not lose your congressman to the likes of her. Bless you, chick, any man with breeks can see what she is and what you are."

"And what am I?" she demanded, but not quite so belligerently as she had intended.

"Lord love you, dear lass—a lady of course. And she's a drab. Though," he rubbed his chin ruminatively and smiling, "I always was one with a kindness for drabs."

JILL Brittin's equipment—safely retrieved and gotten under shelter—consisted of cameras, film, and portable radio and TV transmitters. Lucinda admitted to herself—grudgingly—that the correspondent had authority the moment she was concerned with her trade. She took her pictures at long and short range with certainty and conviction; her formal interview with Joyleg was a matter of crisp questions, courteous pauses, delicate promptings for elaboration. She was brisk and efficient at everything connected with reporting and Lucinda detested the way Weathernox and old Joyleg admired her briskness and efficiency.

Her stories, pictures, television interviews went out. In Rabbit Notch, severed in time and space from the community of newspaper readers and TV viewers, they got the reaction by radio. It was immediate and stunning. Joyleg shook the world.

A crew of men working double overtime—in complete disregard of all peacetime precedent—unearthed the oldest records from the sub-sub-basement of Old Navy. Announcedly unrehearsed, the Secretary of Defense flipped nervously through the dusty old files while a crew of reporters, newsreel, and TV men hovered at his elbows—as though he were speaking directly to Rabbit Notch, the radio announcer was especially graphic in securing this beat so far unobtainable to his TV rival—sneezing and coughing and joking, and suddenly—"Here it *is*, ladies and gentlemen, indubitably and beyond question . . . I just wish

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you could be with us to feel and see these ancient documents . . ." Joyleg, Isachar, born in Shawnee Pass (Pa.) July 4 (auspicious date on which Thomas Jefferson and John Adams died; Calvin Coolidge and George M. Cohan born), 1749, issue of Zebulon and Mehetevale (Simpson) Joyleg. Enlisted in the US Marines, April 11, 1777, served aboard frigate *Alfred*, sloop-of-war *Ranger*, *Bonhomme Richard*, and *Ariel*. Land engagements: Nova Scotia, Whitehaven. Musketball in left breast as result of engaging enemy frigate: inoperable. Mustered out January 24, 1783. Pension awarded in 1800, under the Act of 1790 . . ."

WHAT was the Government going to do about it, a reporter asked the Secretary of Defense. The Secretary fumbled around for a moment. There was no precedent for dealing with two hundred-and-some-year-old GIs. Haha.

"'Precedent'," spat out Joyleg. "Rascally pettifogger!"

"Now, now," soothed Jill Brittin. "Watch your blood-pressure, old dear. He's just doing a little judicious fence-sitting."

XII: . . . AND TURMOIL

THE SECRETARY of Defense was gone from the air, replaced by a voice that seemed to ooze through molasses candy. "Congress is almost ready to recess, having rushed through the appointment of a joint House-Senate Committee to Inquire into Veterans' Surviving Wars Fought Before Eighteen Sixty-one. Need I say, ladies and gentlemen, that the only purpose of this committee is to report on Joyleg? But the peculiarity of this body is not confined to the object of whether a man of over two hundred is—ah—in short, whether Joyleg is Joyleg or not. The committee consists of only four members—a small number for so prominent a group—but it is, of course, strictly bi-partisan: two Republicans and two Democrats. The oddity is that both House appointees are from the same section of the same state—Weathernox and Habersham of—

"That's us," said Tully complacently if superfluously. "I'd like to have seen the Speaker's face when he realized it was unavoidable, since we'd discovered Joyleg. Ha! Haha!"

"I haven't the faintest idea what to wear," murmured Lucinda.

"—really curious feature," burbled the radio, "is the naming of the committee counsel, something customarily left to the members themselves. He is Carl Gloose, a man with a long history as counsel for many Senate investigations."

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"Gloose!" exclaimed Jill Brittin. "Wow! Someone wants to bust up your playhouse, boys and girls."

"Nonsense," said Lucinda reflexively. "We have nothing to conceal."

"Of course not," agreed Tully. "Still, Gloose is a rough customer. It would almost seem that they want to give Joyleg the full treatment."

"Ay? I ken not all this backing and filling, this committee and counsel and intrigue. What's it all to do with me pension?"

"It's beyond your pension now, old sweetheart; someone's after your hide and that of our friends here," said Jill.

"Aye? Then let them come and try and be damned to them," growled Joyleg. "I'll send them back to their Federal swamp with tails betwixt their legs like the curs and whelps they be."

BUT whatever slight shadow cast upon Joyleg's prospects by the strange composition of the committee, he remained the sensation of the country. Even before Jill Brittin departed from Rabbit Notch there was not a syndicated column that didn't mention Joyleg. There were maps of Tennessee, with details of Blountsburg (Union Junction) and Sevier, with arrows pointing to the assumed position of Rabbit Notch. There were pictures of Joyleg and Weathernox and Lucinda. There was an interview with a famous biologist who pooh-poohed the notion of a magic mash with rejuvenating powers; there was an interview with a famous chemist who saw no theoretical objection.

Two by two—unlike Jill Brittin, they did not venture the trail from Sevier alone—strangers arrived in Rabbit Notch. The gerontologist was among the first; he proved to be an enthusiastic amateur antiquarian, listening enraptured to Joyleg's speech and begging him for all sorts of relics, from stray bits of continental currency to a letter signed *Randolph of Roanoke.* Perhaps this friendliness with the object of his examination gave him pause on his return; at any rate his report was long in coming. Those who looked with suspicion upon Joyleg took this as exploding his claims; those who felt differently saw it as pending confirmation.

MR. Silas ("Call me 'Si' ") Allenby had been far less cautious in his talks with Lucinda and Tully.

"Don't think you can just ignore the findings of Buffon," he warned them, shaking a finger. "Don't think that for a minute!"

"But it isn't that I ignore him, Doct—er, Si—" Tully protested. "It's that I never—"

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"—heard of him. I know. Shocking. Buffon? Famous French naturalist. Here." He fumbled in his notebook. "Jotted down some things which bear on the subject. Here's what Frank Holeman has to say. *'Buffon found that the normal duration of an animal's life exceeds the period of growth by a factor of between 5 and 7, or an average ratio of 6 to 1.'* Right? So that man, *'whose growth period is about twenty-one years, should have a normal life span five to seven times that period—namely, from 105 to 150 years.'* Right? Now, doesn't that seem to prove that *'the cause responsible for his being the exception is something unnatural'?* Certainly. *'Hence . . . something that can be prevented by tracking it down.'*"

Lucinda frowned, puzzled. "Track it down? But how?"

Allenby hesitated between the ritual secrecy of his guild and the friendly communicativeness of his own nature. Nature, though expelled with a sheepskin, returned and triumphed. Eyes gleaming, smile anticipating, he said, "I've always believed the skin had something to do with it. Oh, it's easy to scoff at the primitive notion that if a man could only cast off his old integument like a serpent he could live forever. But one of the first signs of senescence is the skin's loss of elasticity . . . almost as if—"

Tully, fascinated but confused, said, "You don't think that our old friend really sloughs off his skin—do you?"

Dr. Si shrugged. "Hardly," he said. "Still . . . . the skin may be the key." Abruptly, he began to talk of other American sesquicentenarian claimants, of Captain Gabriel, the California Indian, baptized in middle age by Junipero Serra, and who had died in the 1890s, older by far than the United States; of Javier Pereira of Columbia, who claimed 1789 as his birth year, and had lived to be examined by relay teams of geriatrists in New York Hospital in 1957.

"They said he might well be a hundred and fifty. He died the next year. Mind you, I accuse no one. Still, it's damned odd that they still refuse to release the report, don't you think? Now, if our friend . . ."

He left the phrase unfinished, anl began to make preparations for his examination.

AFTERWARDS: "Well," said Tully, "what do you think?"

The physician shook his head, shrugged. "I don't *know* what to think. I'm amazed, baffled. I'll say this: He is certainly the oldest man I've ever seen. How old? Not only do I not know, there is no way—in our present state of

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medical knowledge—that an examination or tests can tell me. A man, after all, is not a tree . . ." He seemed not so much to be addressing them as thinking aloud. ". . . radio-carbon far too imprecise," he muttered.

His eyes focused on them, he blinked and smiled. "Sorry . . . you see, no geriontologist, or geriatrist, ever examined anyone known beyond a doubt to be over 115. How the aging process would function past that point, we just cannot say."

Tully asked, "You think that Joyleg is at least that old, then?"

"Oh, unquestionably. Take—just one example—the lens of the eye. Most organs diminish in size with age, but the lens increases. I don't believe I've ever seen a larger lens than his." Lucinda, remembering the old but piercing eyes, shivered. What had they not seen? "And yet—it functions—functions well. The ophthalmoscope shows things inside the eye that, well, I just have never seen or heard of. I don't know if they are the normal aspects of the interior eye of a man over 150 years old, or over 200 years old, or—or what . . . *'Normal!'*" He laughed, uncertainly. "How, in Heaven's name, can we even use the word 'normal' to refer to such an age?"

In his brief, preliminary but official report, however, Dr. Allenby avoided committing himself to more than a cautious "It is not altogether beyond possibility, then, that Mr. Joyleg may have reached somewhere in the vicinity of his 120th year. Beyond that, nothing less imprecise can be said until a more detailed study of the findings has been made."

Clearly, he was not going to stick his neck out. In a letter to Tully, however, prefaced with entreated pledges to silence, he said more.

"The precise mechanism of the process [he wrote] will have to wait for a detailed analysis of the distillate itself, and a thorough examination of the old man, but, in general, I think it is similar to the nutrient-waste exchange that takes place normally through the membrane surrounding the cells of any living thing; the process of osmosis.

"For instance, the blood of an animal carries nutrients, picked up from the cells in the walls of the digestive tract, and carries these nutrients, dissolved in the blood plasma, to every cell of the body. Since the cell is constantly using these substances up, the concentration of the nutrients in the cellular fluid will be less than the concentration in the blood plasma, and the nutrients will flow into the cell through the semi-permeable membrane which surrounds it. At the same time, the waste materials which have

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been produced by the cells' life processes will be in greater concentration in the cellular fluid than in the blood plasma, so the plasma will pick up the waste products.

"Does the same thing occur when the old man soaks himself in the distillate? Are certain nutrients in the booze absorbed by the cells of the epidermis—and transmitted through the dermis to the bloodstream—while waste products are removed? I think so. *The skin is the key.*

"It is my opinion that his liquor contains nutrients not found in ordinary distillates of this sort. As you know, the fungus *Penicillum notatum* produces the antibiotic, penicillin. Other antibiotics are produced in the same way — by fermentation — from other fungi. Yeast, which is used to ferment the mash from which whisky is made, is classed as one of the fungi. Ordinary yeast produces (besides the alcohol which is the main product) other materials—higher alcohols, furfural, and the like—which are the so-called 'congeners' that give whisky, rum, brandy, and so on their various flavors.

NOW, when penicillin was first produced, the strain of the mold that was used manufactured relatively little of the antibiotic. Over a period of years, strains have been bred which produce many times that amount. In my opinion, the strain of yeast used by the old man to ferment his mash produces, during the fermentation process, some nutrient or combination of nutrients that are not produced in any appreciable amount by ordinary yeasts. These products would come over with the alcohol in the distilling process and be concentrated in the product. Right? It is doubtful that drinking it would be of any benefit, since it is likely that the nutrients would be destroyed by the enzymatic action of the digestive process.

"There is also the possibility that the strain of corn used contains nutrients not found in appreciable quantities in ordinary corn, or, perhaps, compounds which can be converted by the yeast into such nutrients. The archaic-type still may retain substances lost in modern, more 'efficient' apparatus.

"It may be that several processes are operating; i.e.: an unusual strain of corn is producing substances which an unusual strain of yeast is converting into the necessary nutrients.

"There is, in my opinion, the likelihood of certain wastes—exact nature still unknown—being removed through the epidermis by the leaching action of the alcohol-water solution — waste products which might be re-

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moved with fatal slowness, if at all, by the normal processes of the body. It may be that it is the accumulation of minute amounts of highly poisonous waste products of this sort that eventually causes old age and death. And we must not ignore the possibility that the local water is of a special sort, either.

"If a combination of all these mechanisms is operating in this case, it is my considered opinion that the noble old soak will live forever."

NOTHING detracted from Joyleg's newsworthiness.

Radio Moscow, after ignoring the matter for weeks, blasted the story as a desperate hoax designed to distract attention from the overwhelming superiority of Soviet science. It was an effort to secure, by a forged grant, an imperialistic foothold on the soil of Mother Russia. Joyleg was a fraud, a tool, a jackal, a gutter-proletarian hooligan, a declassed capitalistic kulak tenant-farmer in peonage doing the bidding of his masters, a lackey of the plutocratic press.

Lucinda knew she was by no means getting the full heat of the Joyleg fever, but as much as did filter up made the Notch almost tropical. A famous distiller repackaged his goods with a new label, OLD JOYLEG. A competitor came back with OLD RABBIT NOTCH. A drug firm asked, Do YOU Want Youth and Energy at 200? Only MAGIC-MASH CAPSULES, a byproduct of the Joyleg distilling process, (synthesized) supply ALL your needs.

The country went Joyleg-mad. Born in Pennsylvania, he pleased the North; living in Rabbit Notch, he gladdened the South; a pioneer, he delighted the West. He was, or had been, a Democratic-Republican: both parties took him to their bosoms, one overlooking his views on taxation, the other his views on the tariff. He held with this and that: the eggheads loved him; he didn't hold with that and this: the anti-eggheads adored him.

It was Joyleg's year, but it was too good to last. Lucinda knew that the serpent had entered into eden when the corps of engineers strung the telephone wires, followed shortly by the electric cables and the towers of an overhead monorail. The first passengers on this conveyance included their fellow committee-members, Senator Alden Tuggins (R) from down east, and Senator Cleveland W. Zillidore (D) from the shores of the Pacific, as well as Jill Brittin and other newsmen.

XIII: THE UNINHIBITED YOUTH OF ISACHAR JOYLEG

THE HEARINGS were held in Joyleg's house. Since even his

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large room barely accomodated the committee, staff, and witnesses, spectators, and press had to be content with crowding at the windows and listening to loudspeakers rigged on the verandah.

Senator Cleveland Wilson Zillidore, not perhaps quite so handsome as his campaign pictures, yet striking in his wavy hair and large, soft eyes, was to be first of the rotating chairmen, even though Tuggins could have claimed seniority. He ran his fingers through his hair, surveyed the audience, smiled, and began, "Now, Mr. Joyleg—"

"A moment, Senator," interrupted the committee counsel.

"Yes, Mr. Gloose?" Lucinda followed the chairman's gaze to the counsel's round face and knife-thin lips.

"With your permission, Senator, I'd like to get the history of Mr. Joyleg's service on the record before we proceed to details."

"Well, now," began Zillidore dubiously. "Actually, the real point is to ascertain that Mr. Joyleg—this Mr. Joyleg, that is,—is the same Mr. Joyleg, or rather that he is the Mr. Joyleg . . ."

"Precisely, Senator. And if he is, he should have no trouble corroborating material uncovered by s—" (Lucinda was sure he had started to say scholars and thought better of the word) "by scientific investigators from the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, Yale, Grinnel, the Library of Congress, National Archives, and Kenyon. Most interesting material."

Zillidore blinked. "Very well, Mr. Gloose."

"Thank you. Now, Mr. Joyleg: please tell us when you joined the Marines."

"Seventy-seven."

"That would be Seventeen Seventy-seven, of course?"

"Seventeen and Seventy-seven," Joyleg agreed.

"Yes, yes," said Gloose. "Now then, Mr. Joyleg, to what organizations did you belong before you joined the Marines?"

"Ay?" asked Joyleg, cupping a hand behind his ear. "How's that, Advocate?"

"I'm not—Remember you are under oath. Let me put it this way: Were you not a corporal in the Pennsylvania militia in 1775?"

His tone caused everyone in the room, except himself and Joyleg, to lean forward, though Lucinda was certain none of them had any more idea than she did what the exchange was all about. Gloose looked tense, Joyleg leaned back relaxedly, no longer even faintly hard of hearing. "Ecawd, master, every soul with a musket, pistol, fowling-piece, or horse was in the milishy those days. Baint they still? 'Tis naught to brag on."

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"But you were in the militia?"

"Aye."

"And you took an oath to serve until discharged?"

The old man shrugged. "Had I a groat for every—"

TULLY had been reading a note carried to him hand over hand from a window. He winced, passed it to Lucinda. *Joyleg personally no issue* (it read) *but his coat-tails are. Got to be cut off to keep the Pres. from riding into renomination on them. Watch Gloose eat the baby.* There was no signature. Weathernox jumped to his feet. "Mr. Chairman, this is not a court, Mr. Joyleg is not accused of anything. Nor is he an unfriendly witness; he appears here of his own free will—he has even extended the hospitality of his house for our hearing. I hope you will instruct counsel not to badger our great and distinguished friend."

This was obviously old stuff to Gloose. He opened his eyes very wide. "Mr. Chairman, my only interest is in facts. I'm sure Representative Weathernox will be the first to assert that facts cannot injure his client—I beg pardon—friend."

"Are you insinuating—"

"Why, Congressman, you yourself just now called Mr. Joyleg your friend."

Belatedly, Senator Zillidore rapped for order. "Let's proceed. I'm sure counsel did not intend to treat the witness with anything but the respect due his age."

"Certainly not, Senator. Now, Mr. Joyleg, when you were on active service with the militia, were you not engaged to one Amanda Peppercorn?"

For a moment longer Joyleg's face retained the impassivity with which he had sat through the squabble. Then he smiled, lifted his head. "Ah, Mandy . . . A sweet lass. Lips like strawberries. And across her nose, three little freckles . . ."

A sigh passed from the spectators, the crowd outside, and the listening audience all over the country as they realized he was speaking of a girl dead and gone at least a century. Only Gloose remained unmoved. "Were you or weren't you betrothed to Miss Peppercorn?"

"Ay, lad—you're a sharp one, and dogged, too. Yet no ladies' man like Dr. Franklin, I can see that. Mayhap 'tis but lack of opportunity. Howsoever, ye may learn betimes that with females 'tis not always one thing nor t'other. Sometimes 'tis both, sometimes neither."

"Well then, since you find it difficult to give a straight-forward answer, in a manner of speaking you were engaged to Amanda Peppercorn. Now: Weren't you also betrothed—at

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the same time—to Arabella Jepworth?"

"Arabella. I had not thought of her for a parcel of years. Bella . . . Now there was a fine little filly. Sharp as the breeze, soft as new-churned butter, sweet as cream. Aye, Bella was a girl to turn your head for a second look."

"Please answer the question."

"I misremember, lad. 'Twas so long ago."

Gloose put his teeth firmly together. "Were—you—not—betrothed—to—Miss—Jepworth—at—the—same—time? Please answer yes or no."

Joyleg settled back. "No."

Gloose looked staggered. "Did you say, 'No,' sir?"

WEATHERNOX jumped up again. Before he could protest, Joyleg went on, "We was betrothed, *de facto*, ye might say, not *de jure*—but 'twasn't at exactly the same time as Mandy and me."

The audience let out its collective breath. It took even Lucinda a long time to reflect that Joyleg's status as a fiance couldn't possibly conflict with his status as a veteran.

"No," repeated Joyleg pensively. "Mandy and me was bespoke in April; I didn't meet up with Bella till June."

The audience inhaled sharply.

"Then you admit there was a period when your engagements were concurrent?"

"Ay? What was that law-word?"

Gloose swept on. "And you are aware, I'm sure, that in August of that year, the unfortunate Miss Jepworth was summoned before the vestry of the North Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, charged with fornication, and pleaded that Corporal Isachar Joyleg had seduced her on promise of marriage?"

The audience broke into a gabble. Lucinda's tones were hard and cold as ice: "Really, Mr. Chairman, it's hard to see what purpose is served in raking up ancient gossip."

But Gloose was now in full cry. "And early that December you were haled before the justice's court on a bastardy warrant—" sensation "—sworn out by Megan Ap Howell, indentured servant at the Bull and Fiddle Inn, were you not?"

Joyleg shrugged one shoulder, as if to dislodge a small fly. "Poor witless Welsh Abigail. She did but name me, as it might be any man, to save herself a skinning from Mistress Grassgreen, who held her indentures. Every maltworm at the Bull and Fiddle knew 'twas Benjy Grassgreen—a lusty lad for his fourteen years—as got poor Meg with child, and so it come out in the justice chamber, and so I was let off."

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Gloose gave the audience no time to erase the imputation. "And right on the heels of all this: overlapping engagements, charges of fornication, seduction, and bastardy, was there not a meeting in January 1776, of the male kin of Amanda Peppercorn, Arabella Jepworth, Allison Smith, Maria Hankins, Judith Bingham, and Nancy Lockerby, with all of whom, it was charged, you had misconducted yourself?"

Sensation.

"Nay."

"Please explain your answer. There was no such meeting? Mr. Chairman," Gloose cried as Tully jumped to his feet again, "the purpose of my questions will be shown shortly—if there are not too many interruptions. I assure this committee I'm not bringing out irrelevant details. Well, Mr. Joyleg?"

"Why, there was naught betwixt Nancy and me her own mother couldn't have witnessed. And you can put that in the log." But his tone was faintly regretful.

Pause, then sensation doubled.

VERY good, Mr. Joyleg. I strike Nancy Lockerby from your list of conquests."

"When she was a maid, that is. I recollect meeting her in '81—or was it '80—when she was a widdy—"

"Oh, you did not exclude widows from your attentions, then?"

Joyleg considered, stroked his long chin. "It depends, I suppose, what you mean by attentions. Seems to me I danced a minuet once with one as had the trimmest ankle a man could fancy: the Widdy Custis, her as became Lady Washington—"

Uproar. This was too hot even for Gloose to handle and squeeze. Hastily and loudly he said, "Did you not, as a consequence of the meeting mentioned, where decisions were reached which could have resulted in indignity, not to say physical discomfort and possibly even worse to you, did you not desert—"

Uproar again. Weathernox shouted, but no one could make out what he was saying. Lucinda, scarlet, was shaking with anger at Gloose. Senator Tuggins looked at Joyleg with critical interest. Senator Zillidore banged his gavel without effect.

Jill Brittin murmured, "Five girls at once—what a man."

At length something like silence was gained, and Gloose unwound again. "And did you not, I say, therefore desert the Pennsylvania militia and enlist in a New Jersey Continental unit—the Monmouth Fencibles, to be exact—where you served until it was bruited about you had retained Tory property illegally—"

Minor uproar, drowning out Joyleg's, "A whipped hound-dog

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I found a better master for."

". . . and again, without awaiting proper discharge, took leave of the comrades you had sworn to serve with?"

JOYLEG stroked the hollow of his cheek with his thumb. "You mean I run off from the war? Flay and peg me if I'd have been the first. Many's the stout lad—not just common soldiers, but gentleman officers with rounds of gilt braid scaring the birds off their shoulders—I've seen slip quietly away and wait for a better time to send the lobsterbacks to hell. 'Twas the same when we took up against General Hamilton's excise, 'twill always be the same of men who baint mercenaries nor caught unwilling by the press-gang. Steuben never got it through his High Dutch head, the difference betwixt free men and parade-ground dummies. We fit because we had a mind to it, when we lost the taste and relish for it, we quit—mayhap to come another day, mayhap not.

"Bloody flux, man! D'ye think we fought because General Washington was a fine figure on his white stallion? Or because Pat Henry had a quick tongue? Or to keep Sam Adams and Jack Hancock from bankruptcy through paying King George's levies? Or because we was all lined up, washed and polished and pipeclayed, and swore we would? Ods wound! It were so, any coxcomb with a handful of seals could get up an army to beat the British, the French, the Dons, and the Dutch—aye, and with the Swedes, Turks, and Tartars into the bargain. Oaths! Swearings! Uniforms! Parades! Musters! Drills! Duties! Do ye think we fit for them? Only a dolt would. And you can put *that* in the log!"

When the place quieted, Senator Zillidore, beaming, announced, "I'm going to interrupt just long enough to read this, which just came in. 'The FBI has compared a fingerprint found smudged in ink on a Joyleg pension voucher for May, 1801, with one of Mr. Joyleg's prints obtained recently, and the director has announced that they are one and the same.' This means there is no longer any question—not that I, personally, ever doubted . . ."

"Nor I," said Tuggins, hastily.

"Vindication!" shouted Tully.

Lucinda cried, "Hurray!"

The audience began to applaud, faltered, tried it again, gave up. Gloose stood with his head a bit to one side in an I-am-waiting-patiently position.

"I repeat my question: 'Then you admit having—not once but twice—deserted?' I take it, Mr. Joyleg, that you have answered, 'Yes'?"

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Joyleg shrugged. Senator Zillidore said dubiously, "Perhaps this would be the best place to adjourn till tomorrow."

XIV: FURTHER REVELATIONS FROM AN INDISCREET PAST

THE MEASURED tones of A. B. Matterhorn vibrated sonorously through the loudspeaker of the portable radio. "And so we see that Mr. Gloose has forced the admission from Joyleg that his relations with women were unstable, and that he twice left one branch of the service for another in an irregular manner at a time when the new nation was struggling into existence. On the other hand, Mr. Joyleg, with his antique rhetoric, has given us something to think about, something to shake our prejudices and preconceptions. What this means to all of us as patriotic Americans, only historians, historians in the future perhaps, can tell us."

"I don't need a historian to tell me that Joyleg was an old lecher, even as a young man," said Alden Tuggins.

Tully Weathernox, sounding as weary as Lucinda felt, said, "Whatever Joyleg's ethics, the fact remains that he has served his country and we owe him better than eleven dollars a month, better than being baited in the witness chair, better than having his character picked to pieces to question his absolute purity."

Senator Zillidore, far more at ease than he had been as chairman, gently smoothed his hair. "I agree that Gloose's methods are crude and even demagogic—he is, in fact, a most unpleasant character—and I wish today's hearing had been on a higher level. Nevertheless I think we must ask ourselves if we can accept a tarnished symbol—"

Lucinda broke in. "But Senator, it isn't up to us to accept or reject Joyleg as a symbol. He exists, he is the last surviving veteran—by ninety-odd years—of the Revolution."

"Well, well," soothed Tuggins. "No doubt our old gentleman will justify himself at the next session." But Lucinda, realizing how Gloose had managed to make even the proof of Joyleg's bicentenial authenticity an anticlimax, doubted the opposite.

HOWEVER, Tuggins in the chair began as though determined to have his prophecy fulfilled. He opened with a gratifying speech pointing out that the committee's purpose was to inquire into the condition of the Revolutionary veteran and accredit him for further assistance if need be, not to rake up ancient allegations of turpitude. Gloose bowed his head—and at once snapped it up and struck again.

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"Of course, Mr. Chairman, there is the question of Mr. Joyleg's being entitled to his present pension at all."

"What?"

"The Act of 1790, passed by the First Congress, under which he receives this pension, referred to commissioned, not *non*commissioned, officers. It might be enlightening to learn how—"

Joyleg cut through the babble which greeted the first attack of the day. "Discharged in Eighty-three," he said, looking carefully over Gloose's head. "Peace was not made with the redcoats until Eighty-four. Betwixt such dates your servant was captain in the North Carolina Militia, fighting off such of the Five Civilized Tribes as was disaffected by the King's agents and stirred up into attacking the western settlements."

Tuggins', "There, you see—" was brushed aside by Gloose. "Now, Mr. Joyleg, yesterday we touched briefly on your desertion from the American armed forces, after which you served in the Marines—"

"With great distinction," roared Tully. "Mr. Chairman, surely it's time we were through listening to gossip and heard something positive."

"—'creditably,' I was about to say when I was so impetuously interrupted," Gloose went on smoothly, with the self-assurance of one who has calmly surmounted the proof of his adversary's more than two hundred years. "Now, all your fellow marines, were not, I imagine, of impeccable reputation."

Joyleg gazed at Gloose blandly.

"Will you answer me, sir?"

"Aye. If I can. And if you ask a question."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Joyleg." Gloose was exaggeratedly abject. "Let me rephrase it. When you were in the Marines, were not some of your companions men with unsavory backgrounds, criminals, fugitives from justice, suspected lawbreakers and so on?"

JOYLEG considered the question. He considered it so long that Gloose began to fidget and had just opened his mouth when the old man replied. "Aye. Saints and sinners too, as anywheres else. Wartimes, the codes of peace go by the board. Today's hero was yesterday's cutpurse. Ye do not ask the man who saves your life with a thrust of his cutlass against the boarder's neck whether he's a regular church-goer or a knight of the road."

"Thank you. And no doubt some of your more dissolute companions—"

"Dissolute? Man, man—how dissolute can ye be after fifty days at sea with naught but the

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ration of weak grog to drink and only the memory of a neat waist to lie with of nights?"

"Very well. Let's hold that question in abeyance a while. Hmmm. All the world knows now of the document granting John Paul Jones a patent of nobility by Catherine the Great, and which he presumably bestowed on the witness—"

Lucinda struck the table with her fist. "Shame!"

Tuggins looked at Gloose as if he'd asked a dollar for an item marked ninety-eight cents. "I really think 'presumably' is out of order, Counsel. The document has been authenticated by all sorts of learned experts."

Gloose bowed to the chairman. "Since the document in question seems to have been validated by no court, and consummated by no usage, it appeared to me its provisions were presumptive rather than established. However, if the word is somehow offensive, I withdraw it. Now, Mr. Joyleg, I want to ask a very serious question."

"If it has aught to do with venery," growled Joyleg, "I'm weary on the subject."

"It has only remotely to do with such matters. Now, Mr. Joyleg, we touched briefly on the matter of your association with criminal characters at sea—"

"You touched it," corrected Joyleg. "Not we."

Gloose thrust his shoulders forward. "Mr. Joyleg," he demanded, "when were you on the account?"

THERE was shocked silence from those who recognized the phrase, a baffled frown from those who didn't. "Aye—the account," Joyleg said slowly. "'Twas bound to get to that sooner or later. Well, many a man has sailed under letters of marque only to swing for a filibusterer; many a jolly rogue has truly been on the account and sailed home to be presented with a dress sword and mayhap made governor of Jamaica or such."

"Ah . . . Then it's your contention that you were never a *pirate*—" he grated out the word; a shiver ran through the leaning listeners, "—but merely a privateer?"

"We sailed with letters of marque and reprisal under the Parmese flag, as we had right, since we was commissioned by the Prince or Grand Doge or whatever his spangly title was."

"Parma," said Gloose, scornfully. "A landlocked duchy—no ports, no seacoast, no need of a navy. But you persuaded them they had need of, ah, privateers, ay?"

"It took little persuading. They was at war with Two Sicilies or somewhat—mayhap 'twas with Sardinia, Modena, or the

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Grand Turk's domains. I disremember. We only made one-two cruises."

"Is it not true, that while you were with the vessel *Frolicking Anna*, a Moorish prize was seized and plundered? That no Moorish nation was specified in your letter of marque? That both the United States and *Parma* were then at peace with the Moors?"

"The States went to war with them later though, and lost the *Philadelphia* doing it. As for our prize, 'twas took in self-defence, for they fired the first shot, thinking we was unarmed. Why man, that was the trade of vessels flying the rag of a Barbary bashaw: *they* was pirates. The best defence is a good offense, and all that scrimshaw."

"So it doesn't seem very important to you?"

"Mmmm. 'Tis and 'taint. All over and done with now. Privateer and prize alike have had their timbers broke up for firewood; seamen and landsmen, boarders and boarder, all dead and gone."

"No," said Gloose reflectively; "no doubt the line between the legal and illegal is not momentous to an admitted deserter and pirate—or privateer. Now, when you returned from the scene of plunder to the United States, within a short time you took up arms against it. This is quite a record: double desertion, possible piracy, and now rebellion."

"Master Weathernox and the Congress-lady tell me pardons was made out by General Washington, signed by his own hand. And 'twas not the States we fought, but Alec Hamilton's whisky tax."

GLOOSE grimaced. "A fine distinction. If I were to take up arms against the income tax I doubt if the government would be as lenient with me as it was with you."

"Mayhap the government is of lesser men now than General Washington, Governor Jefferson, and Jemmy Madison."

"Ah. And what of men out of the government—men like Simon Girty? It's true you knew him?"

"Aye."

"And that you tried, unsuccessfully, to get him amnestied?"

"Aye. He was wicked—but man is sinful by nature, and he was not all wicked. He saved Simmy Kenton's life, who did brave service on the frontier later."

"A pity you weren't equally solicitous for the bloody victims of this dreadful renegade, Girty, who foreswore his own race to fight with the Indians!"

"Race? It seems to me one race is much the same as any other. I've knowed Indians to raise white babes with their own, and the white man who didn't

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learn scalping and tomahaxing with the best of them soon lost his own hair or had his own brains bashed out. Simon Girty fought against his own? Was this the first time white men killed white men or massacred women and children?"

Gloose brushed this contemptuously aside and pressed on. "I imagine you took pains to conceal your fondness for this woman-scalper when you went to Tennessee."

"Weren't no Tennessee then. 'Twas the western lands of North Carolina, and after the Cession, become the State of Franklin."

"Quite so. And since the State of Franklin was never admitted to the Union, North Carolina having withdrawn its cession for the time being, you no longer considered yourself under the jurisdiction of the United States?"

Joyleg's shaggy eyebrows came down and together. "What ox are you trying to shoe now, Master?"

Gloose's tone was triumphant. "I hold here the photostat of a list written in 1795 by one Silas Bigglestave—"

"That marplot never learned to write more than his poxy name."

"—and attested by him, of those he swore sold weapons to the Chickasaw hostiles. And after your eloquent defence of the noble savage, whose name do you suppose leads all the rest?"

Joyleg half rose from his chair, managing to look at once outraged, amused, sardonic, and belligerent. Gloose, who had approached quite close, retreated two steps. "Weapons!" he roared. "Weepons—or weppins in your macaroni speech—Why, damme, if they rusty hatchets, dull knives, and flintlocks from Braddock's time was ever used on man instead of beast, 'twas only again the Creeks, not whiteskins. Many an express we dispatched to the General Government, warning of the Dons stirring up the Creeks and border tribes to keep the settlements from expanding south and west, but do you think they hearkened? Why . . ."

OH YES, thought Lucinda, heartsick. Of course Joyleg had sold weapons to the Indians, risen (and conspired to rise) against the "General Government", been a pirate, a deserter, a betrayer of young girls. It counted for nothing that he could answer each charge with explanation or extenuation; he might have blunted the edge of any one charge but the whole arraignment was cumulative. As the day went on it was disclosed that Joyleg had helped Tories escape the furious justice of patriots. (His rejoinder that the families in question had been innocent of overt act and were in-

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deed merely victims of a looting mob didn't erase the implication of treason.) He had spoken scornfully of the Continental Congress and described the Constitution as "a compact among men of commerce". He thought Nathan Hale had been of "impetuous humor". He had said Mistress Ross couldn't sew for a hillock of beans.

What hadn't he done?

XV: JOYLEG'S RISE AND FALL

LUCINDA WEPT. A better or worse politician, seeing that it was now impossible to rehabilitate Joyleg, would have disassociated herself from his cause, and voters' memories being what they are, in time her advocacy would be forgotten, much better from an officeholder's viewpoint than forgiven.

During the midday recess Lucinda sought out Tully.

"We can't let it end here."

"No, of course not. Look, I'm slated to take the chair when we reconvene; I'll just shut Goose-up—stamp on him, order him out, if necessary—and let the old man have the floor to himself."

She shook her head. "It's too late now. That would have worked if Zillidore had done it right away, or even if Tuggins had done it before the worst damage. But now all the poison is in the record. Joyleg is beyond ordinary rehabilitation."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I don't know, Tully, I honestly don't know. When I think of all those lies, all those sneaking insinuations, I could just strangle that slimy Gloose with my own hands."

"Darling—believe me, no jury would convict you of murder, either."

"I—" They both looked at each other, suddenly aware. Tully reached out, a little tentatively at first, and when she didn't back away, took her into his arms. He kissed her tenderly, fiercely, ravenously. She kissed him back gently, lovingly, wistfully.

For the moment the spirit of '76 and all his problems disappeared. When they finally pulled away from each other, Lucinda cried, "Tully, we've forgotten Joyleg! We must find a way to help him."

All right, darling, let's go back and see what we can do.

THEY entered the big room. Lucinda discovered that her chief disappointment was not for her own ambitions—which would certainly have been immensely helped by Joyleg's apotheosis, or even for the old man himself (after all, he had lived for over a century and a half on his eleven dollars a month without unendurable hardship) but for Tully. Had a few kisses so turned her head that she had be-

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come a different person? "Poor Tully," she whispered.

Waiting for the session to begin—and conceding that Tully Weathernox was certainly a more imposing chairman than either of his predecessors—Lucinda reflected that the worst had been done to Joyleg.

Tully rapped with his gavel. "Ladies and gentlemen. This committee is engaged in hearing testimony pertinent to the condition and services of the surviving veteran of the Revolution. It is not the intent of this committee to muckrake or seek headlines." He paused; Lucinda nodded vigorously, Zillidore and Tuggins gave assent a little reluctantly. "This investigation is a matter of great moment. I hope we can conduct ourselves with the decorum such an audience deserves."

HE turned to Joyleg. "Mr. Joyleg, I want it clearly understood—I want the record to show—that we are not here to invade your privacy."

"Ye mean all that pother about wenching and prize-taking and so on is to be struck out? Ay master, ye'll have naught but blank parchment then."

"Very well, Mr. Joyleg, let's get some of the relevant things on the record; so it's not blank. Now sir, you joined the Marines in 1777; will you please tell us . . ."

But it was clearly of no use; Tully might coax a suddenly modest Joyleg into bashful admission of heroic deeds, of references to the British bullet still lodged in his chest, when the muzzled but not entirely disarmed Gloose had only to raise a skeptical eyebrow or clear an incredulous throat to remind the committee—and millions of listeners—that Joyleg was a blackguard, poltroon, deserter, subversive, pirate, traitor.

Lucinda admired the way Tully maneuvered to get in position where he could attempt to undo the worst. Unfortunately, even the reiteration of Joyleg's fighting record could not wipe out the stigmas Gloose had put upon him. Whether out of pride or perversity, the old man disdained to take the proferred opportunities, showing a stubborn aptitude for verbal quibbles, or answers so qualified they did him more harm than good.

AFTER it was over, the committee met in Senator Tuggins' room. For the first time in her life Lucinda accepted a drink gratefully, and put the glass to her lips without feeling revulsion.

"Too bad . . . in a way," said Tuggins.

"I don't know what you mean by in a way," began Lucinda belligerently. Then she said,

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"Yes, it is—too miserably, miserably bad."

Weathernox, looking tired and rumpled, muttered, "It's a damn shame."

"Question is," said Zillidore, "would another session do any good? I mean, wouldn't Gloose just rampage, and Joyleg give the wrong answers?"

"But he is a veteran of the Revolution and he is only getting eleven dollars a month," insisted Lucinda helplessly.

"Ah, you're young, young," said Tuggins. "For my part I agree with my honored colleague —*there's no point in going on.*"

"If you are agreeable," Zillidore took up, "we can note for the record that the committee met in executive session and adjourned. Merciful end, you know."

"But what will happen to Joyleg?" demanded Lucinda.

"Oh, he'll undoubtedly continue to get his eleven dollars a month. And likely he'll pick up pennies from now on. For good or ill, he's a national figure. And when the hubbub dies down you can introduce a private bill to give him a decent amount. A nice, quiet private bill is always a good solution."

Lucinda's fingernails dug into her palms. "Outrageous."

"Very well, my dear," said Tuggins resignedly; "we'll hold another session."

Tully looked at her. "Do you really want to, Lucinda? Do you still think there's a chance of salvaging anything?"

"No," she answered. "Of course you're right. It would only be futile, or worse. Give it up."

"I think you're being very sensible," commented Zillidore.

"So do I," agreed Lucinda bitterly. That night it turned colder and she dreamed of Valley Forge.

XVI: MUSCOVY DUCKS AND DRAKES

THE JOINT Committee on the Claims of Surviving Revolutionary Veterans left, but signs of their incursion remained. The phone and electric lines, the monorail towers, the barracks—already dissolving as new cabins, privies, corncribs, chicken-pens, roofs, fences, and sheepfolds rose out of this delightfully easy to handle lumber—, a boy baby named Radio Witness Meacham, "Rad" for short, nylons on the legs of some of the girls, dozens of copies of *Life, Time, The Manchester Guardian, Playboy*, cartons of used flashlight bulbs, a taste for candy bars, cokes, cool music, lipstick, Dick Tracy, and—thanks to a radio technician soon to be fired—the poetry of Christopher Smart, continued to remind the Notch of its moment of prominence. On the whole they

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felt they were the gainers; the world had come to them, and they found they were well out of it.

Lucinda and Tully had put off their departure, unwilling to suggest an acceptance on their part of a repudiation of Joyleg.

So it was that they, along with Joyleg and Martha, heard the broadcast from Moscow which came over the air by a series of coincidences for which the Federal Communications Commission got a hundred and seventeen different kinds of Hell.

THE unmistakable sound of Paul Robeson—like a great bell tolling while others pulled the rope—singing *I Dreamed Last Night I Saw Joe Hill* was abruptly cut off by a woman's voice.

". . . the Commert Secretary has now been speaking for three hours to thundrous applause and presently approaches the climax of the subject. I trahnslate: 'So what have we here, Commertz? The old boorzhooi conspiracy against the working class. For who is Joyleg? I ask you, Commertz, What is Joyleg? Is *Joyleg* an instrument of the reactionary imperialist mad dogs?' "

Joyleg cocked his head.

" 'Is *Joyleg* a paid enemy of the Soviet Union? Is *Joyleg* dedicated to the enslavement of the colonial peoples? Is *he* a tool of Zionists and cosmopolitans? Yes, Commertz, you may well shout, "NO!" and "NO!" again and again, for we know Joyleg is none of these.' Here the Commert Secretary pauses while the great hall is filt with applause. The Commert Secretary takes a drink. He takes another drink with a little lemon and salt. He takes a third drink and continues. I trahnslate: 'What is Joyleg? He is an old underground worker, a member of the people's resistance movement, an insurrectionist— Stop, Commertz, don't hiss yet! —an insurrectionist against boorzhooi taxes, against colonialism, against caPITalist enslavement of the proletariat. Yes, Commertz, Joyleg fought the warmongers with a gun—' "

Joyleg frowned, growled, "Pesky feather merchants. 'Twas a musket, as any fool would know."

" '—hiding from the ruthless secret police in the mountains of Tennessee, once the Autonomous Region of Franklin but now forcibly incorporated into their oppressive union. But Commertz, listen to this: the American tyrants have not liquidated Joyleg. They have not dared to mete out this final measure of social injustice. And why? Because, Commertz, *Joyleg is a Soviet Citizen!*'

"Once more the great hall is

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filt with colossal applause and cheers.

THE Commert Secretary continues. I trahnslate: 'Yes, Commertz, but the slavvering dogs do not dare lay a hand upon Grazhdanie—practically Tovarish—Isachar Zebulonovich Joyleg. The might of the Red Army (non-aggressive by definition), The Soviet Navy, the kolhozes, the electrification network, the Turksib Railway, the organs of peoples' culture, and the Communist Party itself, forbid it. It is true, Commertz, that the origin of his citizenship is in a grant by a dynasty now repudiated—though once representing a progressive force, for under it many oppressed peoples were first blessed with Russian culture—nevertheless we accept it in the name of the Soviet peoples. We say to I Z Joyleg, "Mother Russia welcomes you. Come home to her generous bosom. Isachar Zebulonovich —"' "

"Generous bosom, hay?" cackled Joyleg. "Hmmm . . ."

" ' "—come to the Workers' Fatherland! Come and enjoy a hero's reception in the land of peace, progress, and culture!" ' The Commert Secretary pauses; he is now about to begin the main body of his speech. He takes a drink—"

" *'But Joe,' I said, 'you're ten years dead,'* " the rich voice burst into song as the platter was given a spin and then was abruptly cut off. At this point someone, somewhere, somehow woke up to the fact that the unsullied ears of the American people were being polluted by foreign propaganda.

LUCINDA sighed, "Really . . ."

"Well," said Joyleg, " 'Twas a mighty pretty talk."

"Mmmm," said Joyleg. "Generous bosom . . . The Muscovites are a fairspoken lot."

"Ah," said Joyleg. "A hero's welcome, ay? No slander, no tittle-tattle, no—"

"Nonsense," said Tully rudely. "They're only playing politics with you."

"And what was this congress-committee a-doing? Fainting with rare thought and righteousness, no doubt."

"You have no idea," began Tully helplessly.

"Generous bosom," mused Joyleg. "Yes, I've heard tell the Tartar maids be buxom. I've a mind —"

"Oh no," cried Lucinda; "don't think of it."

"Why not? Since I been pardoned by General Washington, what's to stop me?"

"Well," said Tully, "for one thing, you probably couldn't get a passport."

"Passport? Safe-conduct, you mean? Be the States at war with

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the Roosian Emperor?"

"In a way," explained Weathernox. "That is, not exactly."

Joyleg nodded. "Like John Adams and the French Directory." Something flared up in his eyes; Lucinda wondered if it were a momentary vision, a dream of letters of marque, of guns primed and ready, of muskets on the fighting tops aimed downward toward the enemy's deck. Then the eyes quieted. "'Tis no matter. I'll go without."

"But you—" began Tully.

Lucinda interrupted before he could dare the old man with the word, "can't". If Joyleg should really make up his mind to go, nothing short of incarceration could stop the old law-breaker, and she was not too sure of the efficacy of even that. "Listen," she pleaded. "We know you haven't been well-treated, but you're still an American; you do owe something to your country—"

"Aye? I'd have thought the boot was on t'other foot."

"It is, of course," said Weathernox. "All of us are in your debt. But I recall your saying the other day that you hadn't fought for George Washington's land schemes or John Hancock's commercial success."

"Fit the damned lobsterbacks and poxy Hessians. Indian hostiles, too."

"Yes, and you fought them *for* something."

"Aye? Likely we did, looking back. At the time things wasn't so clear. Right and wrong on both sides, you might say."

BUT Lucinda realized Tully was not going to be deprived of this opportunity. "Of course you fought for something: for the self-evident truths that all men are created equal and have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To be sure, your Commodore fought for the Russians against the Turks—there was little to choose between them—but believe me, there's no more liberty or equality in Russia now than there was then. As for the pursuit of happiness, it is simply a hopeless, unauthorized chase. If they seem 'a fair-spoken lot' to you—as they have to others—it's for their own purpose, and it's no purpose any real revolutionist, American, French, or Russian, could possibly endorse. George III was the most benevolent of constitutional rulers compared with those who hold power in the Soviet Union."

"We fit again taxes," stated Joyleg shortly. "From all I can see the States have more taxes now than Lord Bute and Lord North—aye, and Mr. Secretary Hamilton too—ever thought of together, did they still live and keep aworking at it night and day all these years."

Lucinda begged, "At least—"

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"I'm tired," announced Joyleg suddenly. "We'll talk tomorrow, after I've had me soak."

Lucinda looked at Tully. "Do you think he will . . .?"

He shook his head doubtfully. "I'm afraid I'm not enough of a psychologist to predict what he will do. It seemed to me for a moment the old lust for adventure was riding him—but could the spirit sustain the flesh for a trip like that?"

"I wouldn't be astonished if it could. His obstinacy is likely to increase too, if the idea is really in his mind, and insist on going in spite of everything. I wish there was some way to per—"

THE telephone line from Blountsburg had an extension in the big room. It rang now. Lucinda picked it up. It was Jill Brittin. "Listen, you two," she shrilled in Lucinda's ear, "the Russians want Joyleg."

"We know. We heard the Moscow broadcast."

"Who didn't? If they were relayed every day, no one would listen; as it was everybody and his brother tuned in. But do you realize why they want him?—longevity."

"I don't understand; we must have a bad connection."

"Longevity. Long life. How old is Joyleg?"

"Two hundred and twelve."

"Exactly. And do you think there isn't a member of the Politburo or Presidium or whatever the current name is, who wouldn't give up his chance to sit on the right hand of Marx to live a couple of hundred years?"

"But—"

"Once they got him there they'd worm the secret out of him."

"But there's no secret. Everyone in Rabbit Notch, everyone who's read the newspapers or listened to your broadcasts, knows—"

"Quiet. If everyone knows, then the FBI or whoever takes charge of these things will see that the knowledge doesn't leak out. Besides, the Russkys never believe the capitalist American press. In the meantime the secret is our property, part of our famous know-how. It's something we can haggle with them over, and maybe get something useful in return—like the Sovrocket drive.

SO Joyleg has ceased to be a sapper of American morale and has become a national asset with a cash value? Desertion, subversion, piracy, and all."

"My dear, for a politico you are extraordinarily innocent. Don't blame me for looking realistically at the old man; the appraisal comes from a group of VIPs to which ordinary VIPs are mere buck privates."

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"Oh," said Lucinda. "Then this call is not entirely—"

"How clever of you, dear. No, this is strictly cloak and dagger. I'm thrilled, of course."

"But why . . .?"

"Why me? Lots of too numerous to mention reasons. I've done a column about each of you and reams on old Jolly-limb. Congress could scarcely appoint you a special committee of two to guard Joyleg, and it would hardly be wise to have Zillidore and Tuggins traipsing—my how that sweet old man has increased my vocabulary—back to Rabbit Notch with all the retinue and paraphernalia. More obvious things like troops and martial law are out—backfire. If the P— if a very very very important VIP were to reach you personally it would be awkward all around if things went wrong and you had to be repudiated. Finally, it wouldn't look well to have the old beau whisked out of sight and kept hidden. Habeas corpus, and so on."

"I have no idea how Mr. Weathernox will react to being one of Joyleg's keepers. For myself, I find the idea quite distasteful."

"Well, of course it's up to you, Governor, but—"

"Oh, really!"

"If you hang on to Joyleg till they get the paint mixed you can hardly miss, and hoo boy! won't they all come trotting up with marbles and apple-cores for a chance at the brush. Otherwise . . . Well, you won't like this, and I won't say it's been irrevocably decided, but unless you two agree to try to persuade Sergeant Methusalah, I hear there's a very good chance Rabbit Notch will be declared a National Monument by executive order. On account of the pigeons and parakeets and so on. And the Park Service would have to block the way in—which means out too—until their numbers had safely increased."

After a moment, Lucinda said, "I don't think you understand. If his mind is made up—and we're hoping it isn't—then I doubt if we could influence him not to go to Russia after the way he's been treated."

"If you can't, no one can."

"Jill, he was perfectly satisfied—well, almost perfectly satisfied, until—"

"Until you two tracked him down. So it's up to you, now."

"But we didn't—"

"You didn't know it was loaded. Well, we all do now. The Marines' delayed-action gift to the world is all yours. Lot's of luck."

LUCINDA turned from the phone to the patient Tully. "It's ridiculous!"

"So I gathered. Would you mind briefing me more fully?"

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"We're a committee of two unofficially appointed to hang onto Joyleg." She repeated what Jill had said.

"That's ridiculous," he muttered.

"As I immediately pointed out. But Tully—I suppose it's very wicked and unpatriotic—for the moment I'm more worried about what they'll do to the poor old man than anything else."

"I don't think it's either wicked or unpatriotic. Our side places a value on individual fate; it's the totalitarians who believe in sacrificing some for the alleged good of all."

"So they may torture him. Or perhaps brainwash him, have him confess that Rabbit Notch is used to prepare bacterial warfare if they don't get the secret of his longevity."

"But Lucinda, you know there isn't any secret. Just his soak in moonshine."

"So I told Jill Brittin. But is it *any* moonshine, *any* mash? Remember he said something about the particular virtue of certain springs, and so on."

"I see your point. Probably vodka wouldn't work at all. So Commissar Joyleg will have to show them how to set up a five year plan to make a moonshine still. If the Russians duplicated the way old-style illicit Tennessee whisky is distilled and happened to use precisely the right kind of spring water, they might be able to isolate the important factor. What important factor? I've no idea. I drink the stuff, but I'm no chemist. Vitamins, minerals . . . I doubt if he has to soak in it daily, in spite of the feeble way he was when we came. It's most likely cyclic; maybe he can go for a month at a time—if anyone knew what time—without withering. So if he's set on going all he has to do is take a sample of his soak with him. First the Russian chemists analyze, then they synthesize. They might even duplicate the stuff, only to find it won't work on anyone but Joyleg himself."

"Then they'll shoot him."

"Why should they? Sure, they want the longevity formula; that would be nice for the Kremlin boys personally, but Joyleg would be far more useful to them politically. Imagine—the last survivor of the first modern Revolution being quoted as telling the world that Lenin was the only true successor to Washington and that Jefferson has been reincarnated in whoever is the cock of the Soviet walk at the moment. No, if there's one thing they'd certainly do if they got hold of him, it would be to preserve him with utmost care."

THEN there's no use trying to scare him into not going. Could we bribe him?"

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"With what? A couple of months ago, a few extra dollars on his pension check would have worked just fine; now he'd only laugh at it. Unless . . . wait a minute . . . what about a grand tour of the USA for Joyleg? See and be seen. With all the trimmings. Top of the Empire State, top of the Mark. Hollywood and Miami; Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, Seattle, and New Oreleans. Show him the country he made. Instead of talking abstractions, make him see things for himself."

"Do you think it would work?"

"All we can do is put it up to him. And perhaps we can think of something else as well."

XVII: THE BEAR THAT TALKS LIKE A MAN

JOYLEG told Mag to invite them in again. "I'm holding a levee in me soak. Your pardon."

"Oh, Master Joyleg," cried Lucinda, for the first time falling into the address usual in Rabbit Notch; "we were thinking last night—Why not see the country—your own country—for yourself?"

He snorted. "Country which as good as stood me in the stocks? Old bones are brittle for bestriding nags and jogging from one place to another. But a journey by sea, now, when the ice has melted in Crownstadt Harbour so that a ship might anchor in the Neva at Saint Peter'burg—"

"Oh," said Lucinda hastily, "there wouldn't be any jogging or discomfort. You'd need to ride only to Sevier. Then an automobile to Blountsburg and the railroad to Knoxville. Then an airplane—"

Joyleg pursed his lips. "You mean one of the Frenchified hot-air balloons? Nay, lass—such devices are not for Isachar Joyleg. Engines of that sort are well enough to lift a basket of cock-chickens and amuse both rabble and gentry of an idle afternoon; they're naught for a sober man to trust with his life."

"We'll go by any means you like."

"What cabal be a-hatching? I spoke no word of going at all. Of a sudden there's much concern with Joyleg's likes and mislikes. 'Join us on the Grand Tour, Master Joyleg.' 'If the post-shay is disagreeable to you, we'll travel by coach and pair.' Can this be the same Congress that was so uncivil only t'other day?"

"You mustn't judge Congress by the committee, nor the committee by Gloose," said Tully.

Joyleg grunted. "Nor the Rooshians without visiting them."

"What," asked Lucinda, firing at random, "would your grandfather have said about a country where freedom of religion is as restricted as it is there?"

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"Me grandsire? Which one? Devil Dan Simpson, who burned down the Quaker meeting-house? Or Malcolm Andrew Joyleg, who harried the Papists?"

Mag bustled in, curtsied perfunctorily. "Now, Master Joyleg, you've been in long enough, I think."

"Aye; me soak's cooling. I'll join you, Sir and Dame, in a short while."

IN the large room, Tully said in a low voice, "What do we do if we can't persuade him against going?"

Lucinda shook her head. "What can we do? Inform Jill Brittin, who'll pass it on to the Administration, who'll transform him into an unofficial prisoner?" She paced meditatively from the fireplace to the window opposite and back again. She felt dispirited quite beyond the anxiety for her career, Tully's disappointment, the shabby treatment of Joyleg, her very real fears of the propaganda the Russians would make of the poor old man.

The door to the other room opened. "Ahoy!" shouted Joyleg. "Lend a hand here."

He and Mag struggled with a leather trunk, wider at top and bottom than at the waist, richly brown with age. There was a crest on the lid, and the peeling letters C RNWAL IS were splotched with old dark stains which might have been ink or blood. Weathernox jumped forward and took hold. "Thankee," acknowledged Joyleg. "Now let me clear out a partial of gear and relics to make room for me Sunday breeches, pounce-box, and such-like in this traveling chest. Mighty handy it is too; I had it of a vagabone who swore he bought it of a Hessian but 'tis fancy he stole it."

HE took an immense brass key and fitted it into the brass lock, lifted the lid and laid it gently back on its leather hinges. The first object Lucinda saw was a folded red and white striped bunting with a rattlesnake writhing from sinister to dexter. The stripes were almost the same uniform pale brown, but the snake was still visibly black.

"Spare ensign from the old *Alfred*," remarked Joyleg, "me Commodore's first man-o-war, but it flew on the *Bonny Dick* too. No use to man nor beast now. Why I took it for a keepsake I've no notion, nor why 'tweren't used for a dustcloth or mop-rag long since."

"But it's priceless," gasped Weathernox. "Absolutely priceless."

"Aye?" said Joyleg carelessly. "I'd liefer have a handful of shillings or a gold half-eagle."

Ah, thought Lucinda, shocked. That's the trouble. We look at

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him through a sentimental haze. The Spirit of '76 and all that. But he hasn't our perspective, doesn't acknowledge our frame of reference. He's still the deserter, sergeant of Marines, pirate, whisky rebel. He *is* history, so he has no reverence for it. No wonder he isn't neat and tidy enough for TV or the Sunday supplements . . .

Joyleg looked up. "I hear foreign footsteps," he rasped. "Belike 'tis some new plaguey courier from the Congress—it badly needs a Cromwell, I tell ye. Let him begone; I've had my fill."

There was a knock at the door. We have corrupted everything, thought Lucinda bitterly; this is probably the first time Rabbit Notch has forgotten its hospitality. The knock was repeated.

Joyleg roared, "Belay that noise and go about your business!"

Instead of complying, the visitor opened the door and entered. Rotound, his pinstriped suit emphasized his rotoundity. He panted and perspired, as a stout man should; he also looked tired and nervous, as a stout man shouldn't. He stood, blinking against the light for a moment, then removed his homburg to reveal a skull as shaven and pink as his cheeks, bowing with his heels together. Slightly behind him as a lean, tightly-built man, with unshaven dark jowls and a less well-fitting homburg which he didn't remove. He didn't bow, either. "Bezhpopodnikov," stated the stout man. "Special envoy of the Supreme Soviet."

There was a palpable silence while everyone tried to adjust. The thin man stepped closer to the fat one and cleared his throat. "And Comrade Illyn," added the special envoy with obvious reluctance. "My . . . ah . . . associate."

Illyn grunted, staring at Joyleg. Lucinda wondered how on earth they had gotten by the FBI. "I have been instructed," said Beshpopodnikov, "to present to the Soviet citizen, I Z Joyleg, the Order of Suvarov, in recognition of his activities in the progressive cause." He pulled a slightly crushed cardboard box from his pocket and thrust it toward Joyleg.

THE old man peered at him from under his heavy brows before opening the box and taking out the glittering medal. "Order of Suvarov, hey?" he said, weighing it in his hand. "A heavy bauble. Orders and decorations: monarchial pomp. Might have had such macaroni with the Cincinnati, had I cared to. Does this make me chevalier, as me Commodore's medal from King Lewis did him?"

Illyn glowered. "Better than

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that," said Bezhpopodnikov, quickly. "Much better. It makes you a Hero of Suvarov, entitled to special rations equivalent of a commissar's."

"Don't relish me victuals way I once did," said Joyleg regretfully. "Can't hardly distinguish whether venison's from a doe or buck."

Mag came in with a tray. "I brought some cider for the visiting folk."

"That's a clever lass," commended Joyleg. "Help yourselves; 'tis a mild beverage, aged enough to make it smooth."

"Very thoughtful," said Bezhpopodnikov. He raised his mug to his lips and held it there. When he took it away, his "Ahhhh!" indicated both satisfaction and its emptiness. Illyn looked suspiciously at his and turned away sourly. The envoy bowed to Lucinda. "I can see you are a cultured person, Madame. You are doubtless interested in the struggle of the oppressed masses."

"Indeed yes," she agreed.

"Mrs. Habersham is a member of Congress," explained Weathernox.

"Ah, said Bezhpopodnikov. "I have been myself a delegate to the Supreme Soviet. So we are in a sense colleagues."

"In a sense," Lucinda admitted.

Her colleague became expansive as he drank up Illyn's untouched mug and refilled his own. "You should visit the Soviet Union. Never will you see such unanimity, such lack of opposition, such monolithic unity. Decadent boorzhooi parliaments chatter and wrangle, but we act as one man."

"Not always the same man, though," suggested Weathernox.

"I'm afraid our parties aren't so monolithic," apologized Lucinda. "There are those in mine who haven't been happy with me in Congress. And those who'd never be happy with any woman in office. Now they have a very good chance to get rid of me. If they succeed, you and I will be ex-colleagues. In a sense."

"Ah, you will be purged."

"Worse than that," said Lucinda. "I may not even be renominated."

Bezhpopodnikov nodded understandingly. "Why waste the people's time? In the Soviet Union the party selects those best qualified for election. It is like . . . mmm . . . your caucus."

"Not mine," said Joyleg promptly. "I was made governor by acclamation."

"Governor?" exclaimed Weathernox.

"Aye. Provisional governor, that is, of Franklin State after Jack Sevier's term expired and his and the State's false friends slipped away."

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YOUR Excellency," began Bezhpopodnikov. Lucinda had to admit that for all his fat, he was quick on the uptake.

"Druther be chevalier," muttered Joyleg. "Vanity, vanity."

"Excellency," the Russian tried again, "we've heard much of Admiral Jones' gift of the land in beautiful Siberia."

"And now ye want to see the document. Fair enough." He delved into the trunk, produced the parchment they had seen before. "Now then, about me lands in Muscovy."

"Sibirsk—Siberia," corrected the envoy. "Yes, Excellency?"

"They're fitting for a boyar and gospodar to live upon? Plenty of timber and game, a country mansion and so forth?"

"Oh, but your Excellency wouldn't live there."

"Why not?" demanded his Excellency testily.

"Well . . . you see . . . that is, you will be an important person in the Soviet Union. An extraordinarily important person, Citizen—uh—Gospodin. Delegations from every constituent republic, from every autonomous region will wish to see you. You will be a national institution, like the Palace of the Soviets and Lenin's T—like, ah, the glorious Moscow subway. So naturally you will live in Moscow, with of course, a dacha in the country—"

"Mhhh. I mislike cities. Full of stink and flies, malignant fevers, cholera, and yellow jack. As for these pretty little villas, chalets, and such, they're naught but cakes of airy frosting, all gimcracks and no nourishment. Mary Antonetta playing at milkmaid in her toy house."

ILLYN looked ferocious. Bezhpopodnikov said hurriedly, "Oh no, Your Excellency has been misinformed. Soviet medicine wiped out epidemics years ago. And as for our dachas, they are a unique achievement of Slavic culture—"

"Me Commodore's grant said naught of Moscow nor dachas. Am I or am I not the proprietor of those lands?"

Illyn's rumble sounded distinctly like, Nyet! Bezhpopodnikov interposed, "There's no question of that, Gospodin Joyleg. They are indeed yours: ten thousand square versts. The most fertile soil on earth, watered by charming Soviet lakes and calm Soviet rivers, dotted with forests of birch and beech and pine, blooming with glorious collective farms tended by happy Soviet peasants. The present names of the villages—cities, I should say—will be changed to Joyleggrad, Joylegorod, Joylensk, Joylegabad, and so on, and in the Lenin Corner of every study-hall will be a picture of you, Isachar Zebulonovich."

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"All very well," said Joyleg, "but it sounds as though there were a fistful of strings on me grant. 'Tis clear your present Autocrat would keep me under eye in the old capital—not even at his court in Saint Peter'burg—and while 'tis doubtless a pretty enough compliment to rename the villages, mayhap I'd rather do it myself. Say, Heartsease, Amandaville, Jonesborough, Nancytown or some such. 'Twould appear to me, offhand, the land's not mine to do as I wish with."

Lucinda began to relax. The old man seemed to be as much of a handful for the Russians as for the Americans. Evidently the envoy was coming to the same conclusion, for he sighed deeply. "It is a delicate matter, Boyar Joyleg. The land is yours, undoubtedly and unquestionably. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet has confirmed the grant. But private ownership of land in the capitalist sense is impossible in the USSR—"

"Ha!" cried Joyleg. "Ha! Stratagems!"

"No, no. It will really make no difference. Your income will be the same as a commissar's, no more than that: the same as one of our popular writers who explain Russian policy in their novels, Alexei Tolstoy, Ehrenburg, Sholokhov, rich men. The state will provide you with a valet, chauffeur, masseur. Your heat, light, food will be provided free and freely. Suckling pig, vodka, cherry jam, caviar—"

"I won't go," said Joyleg flatly. "Fish eggs or no."

XVIII: FROM THE SALT LICK TO THE BLASTED OAK

LUCINDA squeezed Tully's arm happily. The old warrior had not only resisted the temptation to desert his country but he had, by implication, endorsed the principles of the Grand Old Party. Defeat had turned into victory. She was so elated she could even spare sympathy for Bezhpopodnikov, who was wiping sweat from his forehead. Would they shoot the poor man for failing in his mission, or merely send him to work on Joyleg's grant in beautiful Sibirsk? That dreadful Illyn was grinding his teeth; no doubt he was the MVD agent sent along to report on his chief.

"Is . . . is this your final word?" faltered the special envoy.

"I'm not a one to chaffer," said Joyleg grandly.

Illyn, without turning his face from the old man, snapped his fingers twice.

"Perhaps . . . perhaps," muttered Bezhpopodnikov, and the words seemed to stick in his throat, "perhaps an arrangement can be made in this special case."

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Joyleg set his lips together. "Perhapses powder no shot. 'Tis either mine in fee simple, down to the center of the earth and up to the sky, or 'taint."

It was evident the heavy Russian had little stomach for what was coming. "My instructions anticipated the . . . uh . . . possibility of such a contingency." He pressed the folded fingers of one hand into the palm of the other. "My government agrees to your terms."

Lucinda's heart sank. She squeezed Tully's arm again, this time in despair. The Congressman demanded, "Can we trust your word, sir?"

Bezhpopodnikov sagged still further. "I have it in writing," he whispered, and drew a paper from his pocket which he handed over to Joyleg.

The old man held it close to his eyes, then at arm's length. "Ay, man, I cannot decipher these backward letters. It looks like gibberish to me."

"The cyrillic alphabet," explained Bezhpopodnikov mechanically, "a great Russian invention. I have an English translation also." He handed over a second paper.

Joyleg studied it. "Aye," he said at last. "It appears to be in order. How can I trust it?"

"How can you trust the promises of any government?" contered Bezhpopodnikov, "unless you have larger armies and navies and munitions to enforce it. And in that case you wouldn't need the promise in the first place."

"No democratic government," said Weathernox, "would dare to renege on its word. Public opinion wouldn't allow it."

TLLYN gave a small, crooked smile, but the envoy heard Tully out courteously. "Our government creates public opinion. Yours bows to it—in small matters—for the sake of economy. It is cheaper than keeping your people in order with guns and tanks and secret police—though I seem to have read that there have been times when democratic governments have not been too gentle. Well, we are interested in doing things inexpensively also; it is less costly for us to keep our word to Citizen Joyleg than to antagonize him."

In this Lucinda believed he was telling the truth; he had recovered some of his aplomb and there was no trace of bombast. This was not the way he would have talked for Tass. No sooner was the word formed in her mind than she said aloud, "If you really intend to keep faith with him, then you can have no objection to releasing the story to the press agencies." It was her last card. She held her breath. The round face crinkled as though the

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envoy were going to cry. Illyn gave her a swift, malignant look that flickered like a snake's tongue, then was gone, replaced by something almost respectful. Then he snapped his fingers again.

"Where is telephone?" asked Bezhpopodnikov, only the absence of the article betraying whatever emotion lying behind his dead voice. Listlessly—she had failed, as he had succeeded too well—she pointed. He plodded over, placed the call (getting through to Washington remarkably soon, considering) and delivered his announcement.

Lucinda turned her head away. She and Tully a committee of two to save Joyleg from the Russian wiles! Fantastic. The best diplomatic talent in the country ought to have been conscripted for the job. What could two backwoods Tennessee congressmen do against the craft and cunning of the world's most ruthless negotiators? She could have wept with anger and frustration.

She wondered why the Russians looked so glum instead of gloating over their triumph. They seemed in no hurry to get their prize away. Was it because they had failed to lure Joyleg without making the final concession, thus laying themselves open to disapproval? Bezhpopodnikov fiddled with his pockets—surely he had no further starting papers in them?—his lapels, the creases in his trousers. Finally he spoke, without looking directly at anyone, and he startled Lucinda by speaking with the faintest of accents.

THERE is now one slight complication. To tell you the entire truth, Isachar Zebulonovich, we do not know the exact location of your grant."

"Hay? How's that? Ye've mislaid a parcel of ten thousand square versts?"

The envoy smiled deprecatingly. "Not mislaid the land, merely the location. The map appended to the grant of Admiral Jones—Chevalier Jones—is not, does not appear to be in the archives. This is not important, I assure you, not important at all. One ten thousand square versts in glorious, progressive Siberia is very much like another ten thousand square versts: the same lovely forests, black soil, new cities, splendid tractor factories."

"Aye," said Joyleg, "but me Commodore passed on to me the land as was bestowed on him by Dutch Kate, and as 'twas doubtless a pretty piece of sentiment on her part it'd ill become me to cross the two of them."

"Nicely put, Your Excellency, very nicely put. Unfortunately, the map—"

"If it could be found, your Emperor would confirm it?"

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"The Government of the Soviet Union has already given its word, Isachar Zebulonovich. We will not retract. The search for the map continues unabated. But, I greatly fear . . . the destruction caused by Czarist wreckers during our revolution . . ."

Joyleg got up. "Then all's well." He strode over to the traveling-chest. "For me Commodore, though a trusting man at heart, misliked the intentions of that one-eyed Pot—Pot—Pot-something—"

"Potiemkin!"

"Aye, that's the rogue. Chevalier Jones had the caution to have a duplicate map prepared and its propriety attested by the Imperial Cartographer—some Frenchman. 'Tis a bulky thing, hence 'tis down among . . ." His voice trailed off as he sought deeper in the chest. "Ah, here we be—no, 'tis but a packet of letters from Master Button Gwinnett to Dr. Franklin. How I come to have them I disremember, and why I've kept them is beyond my understanding . . ."

HE finally emerged triumphantly from the trunk. "Knew the poxy thing could not elude me too long. 'Twas hid beneath the charter of the Grand Lodge of Franklin Freemasons. There! Cast your eyes upon that!"

Lucinda tried to look over Bezhpopodnikov's left shoulder—his right was preempted by Illyn—and found it difficult, since the Russian was taller than she. Tully, seeing her predicament, elbowed a space for her, letting his hands stay on her arms. It was not one map but several, the smaller ones around the edges evidently orienting the latter in its relation to various Siberian points. She could make nothing of her glimpses and she had the feeling Tully could grasp little more.

Evidently the Russians did though, for they were shaking their heads, uttering gutteral grunts, exclamations of dismay and amazement, and unmistakable profanities. Bezhpopodnikov was visibly trembling; Illyn struck himself on the forehead angrily. "What is it?" Lucinda asked.

Illyn, for the first time raising his voice, exclaimed, "A-tom-grad!"

"Da," sobbed the envoy brokenly, his English fled.

"You mean his grant includes the city of Atomgrad?" Tully demanded. "The site of your most important nuclear development?"

"Soo-kin-sin!" growled Illyn between his teeth...

Bezhpopodnikov said, "Impossible to . . . Our agreement—it cannot stand . . ."

"After you've told the whole world?" Tully asked. "Remember

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what happened to other diplomats who made mistakes in public. No my friend, your only hope now is to stick to your instructions."

Gustus Praseworthy stuck his head in the door. "There's another press of foreign folk in the Notch, headed this way."

"Blast'm all!" roared Joyleg. "Gustus, damn your crown and collions, pull in the bridge."

"'Twon't help," said Gustus philosophically; "this lot, like the last, was dropped by one of them helly-copters."

THREE men in blue serge suits entered without knocking. They were followed by one in dark gray. The blue serges looked truculent and wary, dark gray looked tired and fastidious.

"Never mind," sighed Joyleg. "Let 'm all come across. We'll have the Cumberland Presbyterian Synod along afore we're done with'm, I'd not be surprised."

Dark gray approached Weathernox. "Monsieur Bezhpopodnikov?"

"I'm Congressman Weathernox. That's Bezhpopodnikov."

"Pardon," murmured dark gray, turning his back on Tully. He waved his hand toward the Russian. "Arrest him," he said gently to his three companions."

"Hold on," cried Joyleg. "What's this about?"

"Illegal entry into the United States, traveling beyond privileged areas, conspiracy to subborn treason, intent to disaffect the armed forces of the United States— Is that enough, or would you care for more? And you, Mr. Joyleg," he said mildly, "had better not interfere. You may be subject to arrest yourself under the provisions of the Logan Act —which you may remember, since it was passed in Seventeen-Ninety—forbidding private citizens to hold diplomatic negotiations with any foreign power."

Joyleg looked grim. "Just try to arrest the provisional governor of the sovereign State of Franklin on his own territory, and I'll fetch ye such a clipe with a tomahax that ye'd bring naught if cried at vandue in Natchez-under-the-Hill!"

"I and my staff have diplomatic immunity," stated Bezhpopodnikov.

Dark gray smiled wearily. "My name is Webster Quill; I am Assistant Secretary of State for Special Commissions. So I know you aren't accredited to the United States."

"I am accredited to the United Nations."

"Then what are you doing in Rabbit Notch, Tennessee?"

The stout Russian smiled. "Gathering material for a speech before the General Assembly comparing the treatment of vet-

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erans in America, Nepal, and Ethiopia."

Joyleg, still wrathful, said, "A question as might be put to you, Master Quill."

"We came from Union Junction as soon as Monsieur Bezhpopodnikov's call to Tass went through —"

"Ho," said the Russian admiringly. "You tipped the wires, ay?"

"Certainly we didn't tap the wires," said the gentleman from the State Department stiffly. "We just happened to be assisting the operator." He turned to Joyleg. "I'm rather surprised at you," he said sorrowfully. "Surely a man of your patriotism cannot really wish to go against the policies of a grateful government—"

GRATEFUL! Grateful, is it? Ha! Ay man, gratitude's not in the nature of the States. D'ye recall the bales of paper they paid us patriots off in?"

"Every dollar was made good," said Lucinda, suddenly remembering which party she belonged to.

"Oh aye. After Alec Hamilton saw that every scrap was bought up by speculators. Moneybags as was neither Patriot nor Loyalist till they smelled where the profit lay. Talk gratitude to them as guzzled their port and marsala whilst farm-boys marched bare-assed- naked (your pardon, Dame) in the snow, or clawed their way along yardarms to truss rotting canvas. 'Every dollar was made good.' Aye, in a way you can say it was. But what of the promises? What of the pledges? What of the patents?"

The skin around Quill's eyes furrowed slightly. "*What* patents?"

"Patents like this one," answered Joyleg, plunging into his trunk again. "This one. Haply a grateful government will confirm it?"

The document was flat, but creases showed where it had been folded and refolded; the edges were dirty and softened. For a moment Lucinda could make nothing of it, so ornamental were the flourishes of the lettering, so confusing the paraphs and curlicues. She glanced uncertainly at Weathernox who was reading with avidity. When she looked again she was able to make out that the State of Franklin doth enact and it be hereby enact[d] by the Authority of the Same, that Cap[t] Ifachar Joyleg of the Militia is hereby graunt[d] in Perpetuity and free of all Taxes until he fhall clear his firft Crop: 1000 Acres in the Militia Diftrict of Wafhingt[n], Franklin State, from the great Cairn to the Middle of the Creek & thence to the Spot where the Same joins with the Oth[r]; from thence to the next

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Cairn by the Blafted Oak & in a ftrait Line to 100 f^t fhort of the Hill Top (fometimes call^d Chepmunk Hill) & fo to the firft C^rn, and including the Salt Lick, the Oak Ridge, Deer Meddoaw, &c &c &c, to hold the Same without Seizure or Efcheat fo long as the Sun doth rize & Grafs doth grow. GOD SAVE THE STATE. Given under my Hand & Seal, J^no Sevier, Esq^u, Gov^r of FRANKLIN, Pref^nt of the Privy Counc^l, Cap^t-G^nl &c &c &c. . .

"Oak Ridge!" whispered Weathernox.

"You mean, *Oak-Ridge?*" breathed Lucinda.

"Not a doubt in the world."

Webster Quill looked up with the same slight smile he had worn during the reading of the patent. It disappeared when he saw the expression of the two representatives. "Surely not!"

Lucinda nodded.

"*The* Oak Ridge?"

"Not a doubt in the world," repeated Weathernox.

Quill went white, sat down suddenly.

XIX: STALEMATE?

AYE, THE Oak Ridge," said Joyleg, his good humor apparently restored. " 'Tis a pretty stand of timber, well fit for shipwrighting. But who'd launch a ship there, or cart the lumber to the seaboard? Where it stands 'tis naught save firewood. But that deer pasture, now, 'twould make a pretty farm."

Quill glanced up and caught the Russians' wary eyes. "Better get those two out of here," he said in a low voice, getting up.

Lucinda shook her head. "They know by now, anyway. There's no possibility of keeping them quiet. What's more to the point, we—including you, Mr. Quill, as of now—have just become aware that Mr. Joyleg's Russian grant is set square across the site of Atomgrad. Interesting coincidence, isn't it?"

"Providence," said Weathernox reverently.

Quill sat again. "But this patent is worthless. Franklin was never admitted to the Union, so it was never a state."

"That's a question," said Tully slowly. "In a way it was, because it functioned as one without much interference. *De facto* and all that. Many of its legal acts were later confirmed by North Carolina and Tennessee, including its land grants. Mmmm, yes . . . . I remember now. The case of Ingram's Heirs versus Coxe was one such precedent. There are others."

"But surely," said Quill, "In the case of Oak Ridge the courts would hold this patent against public policy?"

Lucinda said, "Perhaps ordinarily, except for the endorsements." Her finger pointed to the

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parchment below Sevier's signature. She read aloud. "Said Document drawn by me, And[w] Jackson, Att[y]-at-Law. Patent acknowl[ed], & certif[d] as lying within the Terr[ty] of the U States South of the Ohio. Tho[s] Jefferson, Sec[y] of State. G[eo] Wafhington, Pref[nt] . . . There's not a court in the country which would override those names."

Quill, pale, said, "We could not turn the hub of our nuclear fission work over to one man."

Bezhpopodnikov said, "I trust the American Government is not seeking to destroy the right of individual ownership, or deprive of his rightful property the Soviet citizen, I Z Joyleg?"

"You could," said Lucinda, ignoring the Russian, "if he happened to be the same man who owned the hub of the Soviet nuclear fission work. Stalemate?"

The State Department man turned to one of the Justice Department's men. The latter said, "Can't get Washington. Can't even get Blountsburg. Wire's dead."

Joyleg remarked placidly, "Expect some thrifty Frank has cut out a smart chance of it for trapsnares. Place baint called Rabbit Notch for naught."

"Not stalemate," said Webster Quill; "at most a temporary deadlock."

"Very well," said Lucinda. "A deadlock and an opportunity." She addressed the Russian envoy. "As a delegate to the U N, are you empowered to negotiate directly with a member country?'

BEZHPOPODNIKOV considered the question with his eyes on Illyn, who remained imperturbable. "Subject to ratification by my government, yes."

"And you, Mr. Secretary?" she asked.

"I could initial an agreement, but it would have to be approved by the Secretary and the President. Confirmed by the Senate if it were a treaty, not if it were an executive order."

"Good enough," cried Lucinda. "Gentlemen, will you give me a few minutes to talk to Master Joyleg before you go any further?"

"I haven't the faintest notion what you can be driving at," confessed Quill.

"Nor, I'm afraid, will I, when you explain to the House Committee how big an appropriation your department needs to maintain your division. But I'll be glad to have you instruct me," she added, almost gaily."

"Um," said Quill. "Umm. The pleasure will be mine, I'm sure."

Lucinda plucked Joyleg's sleeve and drew him aside. She whispered lengthily in his ear. She had feared he would protest, more from lack of understanding than from selfishness, but he

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patted her on the arm, saying, "Go to it, lass; thou'rt a better man—aye and a better Congressman—then many and many a coxcomb in breeches. Have thy say; I'll stand behind thee to the full."

She pressed his hand and turned to the others. "This is our proposition: Master Joyleg will lease both his properties to an International Commission for the Control of Atomic Energy for peaceful purposes for a period of a hundred and ninety-nine years in consideration of a monthly rental of . . . of . . . fifty dollars—"

"Gold," interjected Joyleg; "None of your pretty banknotes for me."

"—of fifty dollars in gold and . . . and—"

"A flowered waistcoat of good quality every year," said Joyleg. "In case I should have a mind to go courting," he added in explanation.

"And other considerations," amended Lucinda. "Both properties to be freely accessible to the United Nations at all times and not subject to the sovereignty of the states within whose boundaries they lie."

"Ridiculous!" snapped Bezhpopodnikov.

"Preposterous!" exclaimed Quill.

"Inconceivable," muttered Bezhpopodnikov.

"Not to be thought of," said Quill.

"Ha," said Bezhpopodnikov; "one sees for oneself how the warmongers refuse to give up a single weapon."

"The representative of the USSR knows his country would not accept a constructive solution to the question," said Quill.

"The plutocrats will never compromise with the peace-loving countries, as is obvious," said Bezhpopodnikov.

"We have had too much experience with Soviet doubletalk," stated Quill.

GENTLEMEN," Lucinda broke in firmly. "You are not before microphones, you have no audience outside this room. Be reasonable, I beg you. This is your chance to break the deadlock that always comes in high-level conferences. I don't know that the acceptance of Master Joyleg's offer will bring world peace and understanding. It is quite possible, even unfortunately likely, that it won't. But this is your opportunity to try. If you should succeed, we would all be irrepayably in your debt; the Bezhpopodnikov-Quill pact will be a milestone in history—a great milestone."

"Hang John Jay," muttered Joyleg, and then, as if repeating a litany, "Damn those as won't hang John Jay. Damn those as

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won't damn them as won't hang John Jay."

Lucinda went on, "And it's even possible we overestimate the chances of failure. If the world gets a hint of your negotiations—and it is not entirely unlikely it will—your superiors will not dare disavow you."

"Look at the more immediate picture," she went on. "The Russians want Joyleg for his great propaganda value; the Americans want to hold onto him because his loss would be a diplomatic defeat. Behind this, as we all know, is something else: the secret of longetivy. There has never been a secret, of course, but because it was revealed immediately no one believes this. Very well, I'll repeat this secret for you again—give it to you fully and freely."

"Ah," breathed six visitors simultaneously.

"However, there is a price to pay for this longevity. Not for the secret but for its use. It is up to each individual to determine whether he or she will pay that price."

Unexpectedly, it was Illyn who spoke. "I pay. Anything. Anything at all."

"I must say," remarked Quill, "this sounds extraordinarily like a pact with the devil or some such mysticism."

"Not at all," said Lucinda. "Everyone knows alcohol is a preservative. There is some special quality, yet to be analyzed, in the whisky in which he soaks himself. That's all there is to the 'secret', the rest is up to science and research. But the price—"

SHE could not help but pause while the pent breaths were let out.

"But the price— Well, the records show our friend has been married & widowed nine times, and his youthful indiscretions have been made a matter of public account. Has no one thought to ask where are his descendents?"

"By Heaven!" cried Weathernox. "I never thought—"

"Ah . . ." sighed Quill.

"You mean," asked Bezhpopodnikov laboredly, "that the price of great age is sterility?"

Lucinda nodded.

"Ha!" said the envoy. "How poetic! How Russian!"

"The teeming millions of the Orient," Quill said thoughtfully.

"Make Joyleg the first world citizen," suggested Lucinda; "his property and his secret to be the possession of all mankind. The names of Quill and Bezhpopodnikov will always be remembered. Immortality has advantages even over longevity."

"Machiavelli," whispered Weathernox admiringly.

"We . . . uh . . . might discuss it," admitted Quill.

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"Conversation can do no harm," the Russian agreed.

"No secret talks," warned Illyn.

"Certainly not," said Quill. "May I suggest we adjourn to Sevier or Blountsburg and see if we can draw up a draft protocol . . ."

"Whatever happens," said Joyleg, "I'll stay put."

"What!" cried everyone else in the room.

"Aye. 'Tis me final decision. Mind, I hold nothing against any of ye. But here I'll remain."

"But Your Excellency, what of your lands in Sibirsk?" asked Bezhpopodnikov in dismay.

"What of them? They'll not slip away. Mistress Habersham has shown you how to make a treaty on them with profit; if you and the lad from the Department of Foreign Affairs—I beg pardon, State—can but swallow your suspicion of each other long enough to agree, 'twill be of advantage to all the world. Not that I have great faith in potentates, principalities and powers at my age; still a man must work with the tools to hand when he can't get better."

UP TO now Martha had remained silent, her face mirroring respectful admiration for Lucinda's coup. "When you are Governor of Tennessee—"she began.

Lucinda felt the old excitement surge through her. "I wonder if I have a chance for the nomination, really?"

Tully waved a reassuring arm. "No party could fail to endorse the candidate who so brilliantly brought Quill and Bezhpopodnikov—by the way, where are they?"

"Left," said Joyleg succinctly. "Anxious to hold a powwow on their own, without females holding forth. I mind the Cherokees was the same: no squaws in council whilst we passed the pipe betwixt ourselves and swapped iron pots, brass medals, and pewter gorgets for good land. Savages, be they red or white or Tartar, are alike in fearing the power of women. But not Isachar Joyleg; I've lived long enough to know the bewitching sex is likewise the rational one. And if you've a mind to be Governor and commander-in-chief of Tennessee, why, happen 'tis time to call the Franklanders together, dissolve the state, and demand inclusion in Tennessee."

"There!" cried Tully. "Can you miss, now? You started the Soviet-American treaty, kept Joyleg at home, finally extinguished the State of Franklin and added it to our own. It's a shoo-in."

"But it was you," she said troubledly, "who first recognized the justice of Joyleg's cause."

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He smiled at her. "Suppose the Democrats nominated me," he said. "Do you suppose I'd run against you, even at the risk of seeing a Republican elected?"

She felt warm and confident and just a little bashful. "Why not?" she asked boldly. "At least we'd keep it in the family. Unless . . . unless you absolutely refuse to marry a Republican."

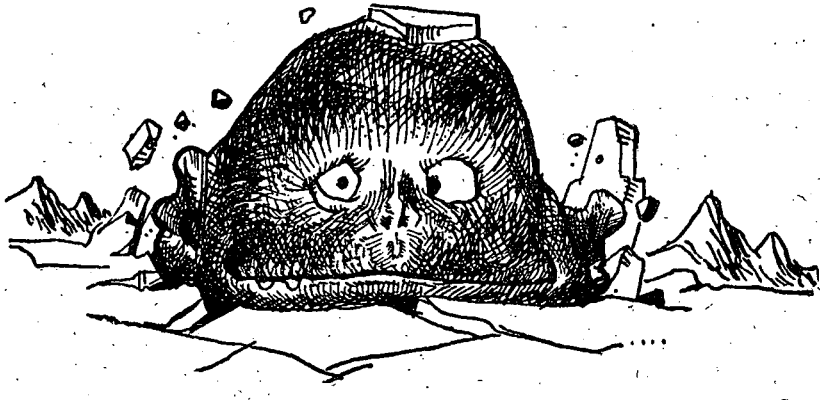
HE moved swiftly. She closed her eyes. Maybe I had to push him a little, she thought, but it was worth it. I don't care if Martha and Joyleg are looking, she thought, I don't care about anything . . .

"Ay well . . ." She heard Joyleg's voice from far off. "Ay-well, I hope ye'll not forget to see to raising me pension when ye begin taking an interest in the rest of us sinners once more. Bless me soul, I'm right pleased to see times have not changed so mightily after all and that lads and lasses can still buss as heartily as they did in Poor Richard's day. Lord love the two of ye, even if ye be Congress-people and doubtless voted for the excise.

"Though I have meself set against wandering into foreign parts it might hap one of these days I'll get me down to Nashville and do a minuet at a marrying if I can light upon me best buckle-breeches I'd swear was packed next to me pounce-box."

He delved into the trunk. "Who knows," he said over his shoulder, "but what the Governor and her consort—or the Governor and his lady—will make me known to some likely maid who'd not overmind becoming Mistress Joyleg at the sight of me in a flowered waistcoat."

He came up with a small, a very small, shoe. "Ah me. She surely had a trim foot, the Widdy Custis had . . ." **THE END**



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NONSTOP TO MARS

By JACK WILLIAMSON

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

JACK WILLIAMSON clearly remembers that the editor of ARGOSY *remarked, after buying* Nonstop to Mars, *that if he had read a synopsis of it first, he would certainly have rejected it as being too improbable. And wildly improbable it certainly sounds, for in it a man flys to Mars from Earth in an ordinary airplane and that was awfully hard to digest even in 1939 when the story first appeared.*

Nonstop to Mars *is a story*

Illustrator
ADKINS

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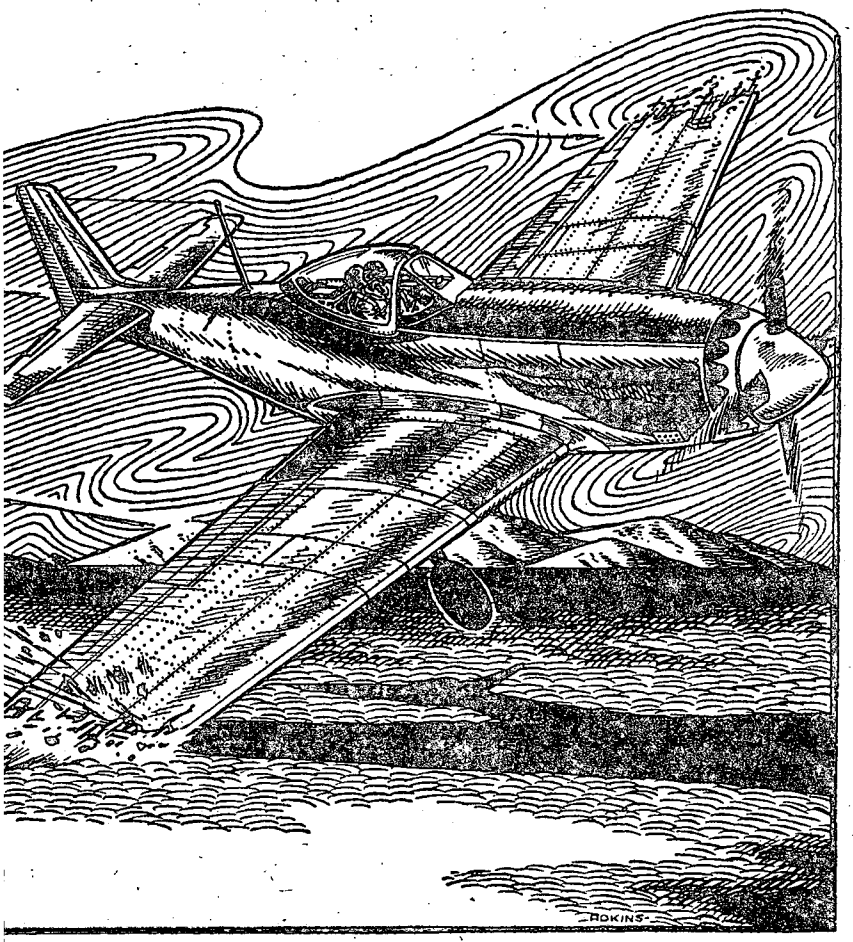
that is more fascinating than unified. The author seems to have connected three stories into one relatively short novelette, each with an idea absorbing enough to have made a good story in itself. Good story ideas have always been short, but in 1939, science fiction writers were more prodigal, less inclined to carefully ration out each notion, not as worried if a little of the skeleton showed.

The early part of Non-Stop to Mars *deals with the day after tomorrow, when propeller-driven aircraft have become the vehicle of sportsmen and professional*



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stunt men. The central portion of the story relates the famed airplane trip to Mars with its highly controversial explanation and the tail end of the yarn is gripping epic of realism and survival on the hostile surface of the planet Mars.

You will be surprised by the smoothness of the writing and this story should serve as excellent background on a man who has already made three adroit adjustments to the changing vogues in science fiction since he sold his first story to AMAZING STORIES *in 1929 and who is making his fourth comeback in the science fiction magazines now. Jack Williamson is a man who knows the science fiction medium thoroughly and the fact that he is completely at ease in this element is quickly apparent.*

I

Something was queerly wrong—with either the ship or the air. And Carter Leigh knew that it couldn't be the ship. The creaking old *Phoenix* might be obsolescent in a world that the new cathion rockets had conquered, but he knew every bolt and strut of her. Knew her well enough to take her apart and put her up again, in the dark. And loved her, for her loyalty through six years and half a million miles of solo flight.

No, the trouble couldn't be in the *Phoenix*. It had to be the atmosphere.

He couldn't understand it. But the barometric altimeter had kept luring him down, toward frozen peaks that loomed a thousand feet higher than they should have been. The engine labored, and the thrust of it weakened dangerously. And the wind that struck him over the pole was a screaming demon, more freakishly violent than he had ever met before.

It baffled him. Through all the endless, weary night, deaf with the long thunder of the loyal old engine, sitting stiff with cold even in his electrically heated suit, gulping coffee from a vacuum jug, pouring over charts and studying instruments with aching blood-shot eyes—ever since the last strange sunset, he had hopelessly picked at the sinister riddle.

Nonstop flights were nothing new to Carter Leigh. Men, looking at the long record of his feats, had nicknamed him "Lucky." But he had something more than luck. In his lean body there was the tremendous endurance that it took to fly on, hour after straining hour, when most men would have dropped over the stick.

And this flight—nonstop from

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Capetown to Honolulu, across the bottom of the world—had promised to be no harder than the rest. Not until he saw that last sunset.

Behind him, beyond the cragged granite fangs of Enderby Land, as he climbed above the ramparts of the polar plateau, the sunset had been frighteningly strange. An incredible wheel of crimson, rolling along the rim of the world, it had been winged and tufted with eldritch green.

THE aurora was another disquieting scrap of the puzzle. It burned above him all that night, whenever the sky was clear, until all the white antarctic wilderness seemed on fire with its sinister and shifting brilliance.

The cold was another thing. Leigh had made polar flights before. But never had he met such merciless temperatures. The motor, even with cowl ventilators closed, grew sluggish with it. It crept into the cockpit and probed deep into his body.

Beyond the pole and Marie Byrd Land, over the dark Antartic again, he met a wall of cloud. He tried to climb over it. Heavy and dull with altitude and fatigue, he opened the oxygen valve. The vital gas revivied him a little. But the plane could not scale the summits of vapor. He flew into them—frightened, wondering.

SAVAGE winds battled in the cloud, and it was riven with lightning. Rain hammered the ship, and froze on it, until the ice dragged it almost to the surface. Leigh fought the elements, and fought the mounting weariness in him, and came at last unexpectedly into the calm of a strange northward dawn.

The aurora was fading from a sky grown brilliantly clear. Studded with white points of icebergs, the gray South Pacific was sliding back at three hundred and fifty miles an hour—still a good pace, he thought stubbornly, even if the rockets were three times as fast.

Leigh was peeling an orange, beginning to hope that all the terror of the night had been the child of fancy and fatigue, when he saw the thing in the northeast. Against the red and green of a suddenly disturbing dawn, it fell like a silver thread.

A white, spiral vortex—the funnel of a great tornado. He saw a blob of gray mist about the foot of it, marching over the sea. The upper end of it, oddly, was lost above the bright wings of dawn.

Leigh had never seen a storm just like this one At first he thought there was no danger to him. But the white, writhing snake of it whipped toward him with an appalling quickness.

It seized the *Phoenix* in a sud-

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den blast of wind, sucking the ship toward that racing funnel. Sea and sky spun madly. He was lifted so swiftly that his eardrums ached. Grimly he fought it, with all his calm skill and all the familiar strength of the ship.

He fought—and won. The white pillar left him fluttering in its wake and marched on into the west. Hurried observation of the higher sun told Leigh that he had been flung fifteen hundred miles northward.

But he knew, with a sinking in his heart, that the *Phoenix* was crippled. Her right aileron had been twisted and jammed by the force of that incredible wind. He would have to set her down.

WHISTLING the tune of *Barbara Allen*, which always seemed to cheer him, Leigh searched the maps. He found a pinprick of land named Manumotu—the only possible haven in a thousand miles—and turned the limping amphibian toward it, flying with rudder and throttle.

One more failure. Two, he reflected bitterly, in a row. For the last flight, two months ago, had failed also, from a cause as strange as that tornado.

A "bipolar" flight, Tick Tinker had called the last one. Tick was the tireless little publicity man, one-legged and one-eyed, who was Leigh's partner in his singular business of wresting a living from the air. "Bipolar," because the route from Croydon back to Croydon along the prime meridian included both the poles. Leigh had safely rounded the planet, with but three scheduled stops. But the flight had failed just the same, because of the Stellar Shell.

"We're an out-of-doors advertising firm, Lucky," Tick used to say. "You fly for attention value. And I sell it to the makers of oil and piston rings and what-have-you. And it's a legitimate business, so long as you can keep in the headlines.

But all the headlines two months ago had been about the Stellar Shell. Some astronomer named Gayle, the day Leigh took off from Croydon, announced discovery of a mysterious missile plunging out of the depths of space, toward the solar system. The "bipolar" flight had earned no more than a few sticks of space on the inside pages. For the black streamers ran:

STELLAR SHELL
SHOT AT PLANETS;
WILL OBJECT STRIKE EARTH?
ASTRONOMERS BAFFLED

When Leigh came in to Croydon again, the flight completed in three grueling days, there was no crowd to meet him. Staggering away from the dusty, oil-spattered *Phoenix*, he himself paused to buy a paper.

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COSMIC BULLET HITS MARS;
EARTH SPARED;
NATURE OF OBJECT UNKNOWN

There had been no more news of the Stellar Shell, nothing more than the speculations of bewildered scientists. But the flight was already ruined. Tick Tinker had radiographed:

CONGRATS ON BIPOLAR FLIGHT. BUT STELLAR SHELL HOGGED THE HEADLINES. FLIGHT TOTAL LOSS FINANCIALLY. YOUR NAME GETTING RAPIDLY UNKNOWN. TESTIMONIALS BEGGING AT CUT RATES. URGENT RELEASE DETAILS NEW PUBLICITY FLIGHT. SUGGEST SOMETHING NONSTOP POLAR. USE ZEROLUBE BRAND OILS FOR TESTIMONIAL.

And so Tick's message had brought him here, dead with fatigue and heading toward a speck of rock that probably had no inhabitant.

THE motor covered the windshield with a thin spray of oil, and Leigh stopped his whistling briefly to curse all Zerolube products. He plugged in his helmet phones and switched on the little battery transmitter. It was good for just ten minutes of continuous sending—the *Phoenix* had no room for heavier equipment, not even emergency rations.

"SOS!" he called. "Pilot Leigh in airplane *Phoenix* forced down by storm. Will try to land on Manumotu. SOS—"

The instant reply surprised him:

"Manumotu Station, Gayle Foundation, calling airplane *Phoenix*. Dr. E. K. Gayle speaking. Land on north beach. I will stand by to assist you. Come in, airplane *Phoenix*."

'Airplane *Phoenix* calling Manumotu Station, gasped Leigh, relieved. "Thanks, doc. I'll be seeing you, if I can keep out of the water half an hour longer. Signing off."

It took an hour—an hour that seemed endless to Carter Leigh fighting the fatigue in him and nursing the crippled plane. But at last Manumotu came out of the sparkling northward haze. A cragged volcanic summit appeared sheer on three sides, edged on the north with a scrap of coral beach.

He crossed the beach. A broad rocky bench above it was tufted with tropical green. A long shed-like building of white sheet metal stood upon it, a white tent, and a great pile of crates covered with brown tarpaulins. A white flag waved. Then he saw the tiny figure running from the tent toward the beach.

The landing was hazardous. The crippled wing caught the crest of a wave and covered the plane with spray. She staggered, but came up bravely. He taxied in and rolled up on the blinding coral sand.

Following the signals of the flag, he brought the *Phoenix* to a

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safe dry stop where a rocket must have been moored, for there were deep wheel-marks in the sand, and the hibiscus bushes beyond were scorched black as if from rocket jets.

Heavily, his legs as stiff as if they never had been straightened before, he climbed out of the cockpit. The person with the flag came to meet him. A slim young figure, in boots and breeches, khaki shirt open at the throat, yellow head bare. A crisp voice, brisk, impersonal, greeted him:

"Hello. You are the famous Lucky Leigh?"

"In person," he grinned. "And thanks for showing me the way in, doc—"

His jaw fell. This was a woman—a girl. Her intent oval face was dark with sun. Her keen blue eyes were scanning his heavy, swaying body—not altogether, he thought, with approval.

"Oh!" he said. "I thought you were Dr. Gayle."

"I am," she said gravely. "Dr. Elene Kathrine Gayle."

His red eyes blinked at her.

"You—you aren't the Dr. Gayle who discovered the Stellar Shell?"

She nodded.

"My father was a leader in his field of science. He established the Gayle Foundation. But he has been dead five years. I have been trying to carry on his work." She studied him gravely. "Do you object to my discovery?"

"You ruined my last flight," he told her. "I lived through seventy-six hours of hell; I set a record for gasoline flight over both poles. And what with your Stellar Shell, the world never knew I had been off the ground."

"And, I suspect, was little the worse for the fact." Leigh flushed at the hint of sarcasm in her voice. "However—are you hungry?"

"Famished," he told her.

ON A rough pine table in the white tent, she slapped down two tin plates, split open cans of meat and butter, indicated a big vacuum urn of coffee, a huge jar of marmalade.

"Proceed," she said.

Leigh's dull eyes were watching her.

"You're the whole crew here?"

Her boyish yellow head nodded.

"Emergency," she said. "The Foundation is establishing twenty new meteorological observatories. Manumotu Station was the most important, because it is directly in the track of the phenomena we are investigating. Therefore, I took charge here myself."

"Alone?"

"I had two assistants. But Dr. French took acute appendicitis,

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and Cragin flew him out in the rocket. Should have been back yesterday. But didn't show up. I'm carrying on. . . . You said you were hungry."

She dumped half a can of corned beef into her tin plate, passed the remainder to Leigh. But he sat, wonderment rising against his mist of sleep, staring at her.

"Emergency?" he questioned.

She nodded.

"Something is happening to the atmosphere."

"I thought conditions were strange," he said, "flying over the pole."

She pushed back her plate to seize a notebook.

"What phenomena did you observe?" she demanded eagerly.

He told her in a tired sleep-fogged voice about the strangely gaudy sunset, the aurora, the phenomenal cold, the unaccountably low barometric pressures, the singular tornado that had crippled the *Phoenix*.

"What does it all mean?" he concluded. "What is happening?"

"I'm here to find out," she told him. "Sunset and aurora probably due to abnormal electronic bombardment of the ionosphere. But the storms and pressure disturbances are still not accounted for. Unless—no, the only conceivable answer is too appalling."

She looked quickly at her wrist watch, dumped the debris from her plate into a pail beside the table, wiped plate and spoon clean with a paper napkin. She rose.

"Excuse me. But the duties of both my assistants have fallen upon me. My time is budgeted. I have forty-eight minutes a day for meals. Now I have instruments to read."

"So that's how a lady astronomer lives." Leigh grinned. "If I can help you—"

She shook her head with evident disapproval.

"I doubt it. Our work here doesn't consist of publicity stunts. . . . Eat as much as you like. You'll find a cot behind the partition. I'll radio directions to your rescue party. Please keep in mind, when you leave, that it is the policy of the Gayle Foundation to avoid unnecessary publicity. Especially, we don't want to alarm the world about these current meteorological phenomena, until we have more comprehensive data."

LEIGH was staring at her, a slow anger rising in him. "Look here, you think I'm a pretty bad egg?"

Her keen eyes swept him impersonally.

"Frankly, Mr. Lucky Leigh," her cool voice said, "your existence and your stunts annoy me.

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I can't see that you serve any creative function. In the precarious early days of gasoline aviation such men as you, testing equipment and exploring routes, may have served a useful end. But now that rockets are as fast and as certain as the sun, you are a mere anachronism."

Leigh opened his mouth to protest. But the girl held up a brown imperative hand.

"I've got no time to listen to you," she said. "Because I have vitally urgent work to do. I am already upsetting my schedule. But I've wanted for a long time to tell you a thing or two."

Her smooth face was flushed a little. He listened to her, grinning.

"Now," she went on swiftly, "if you were trying to fly nonstop to Mars, even if you never got there, that would be a different proposition. Because you would be expanding the horizons of science. You would be doing something different and important.

"But your old gasoline wreck is as far behind the times as you are, Leigh. It is a rocket that will make the first flight to Mars. I know a man who may pilot the first rocket there. He is Laird Cragin—you never heard of him, because he isn't a publicity flyer. But he is test pilot for the experimental space rockets that the Foundation has been working on, in association with some Army engineers. You ought to meet him. Because whether he ever gets to Mars or not, he's trying to do something real."

Carter Leigh gulped.

LISTEN, Miss Gayle," he protested. "You've got me all wrong. I used to like the glory, I admit. But now it's just a business. I've come to hate the clamor and the crowds, and I always skip the banquets. Tick Tinker is my contact man; he releases the publicity, does the testimonials, handles all the business end. We're just trying to make a living."

Her brown chin squared. And, through the gray haze of fatigue that filled his mind, Leigh suddenly perceived that a lady astronomer could still be very good to look at.

"It is possible," her cool crisp voice was saying, "to make a living in a way that helps others besides yourself. Here you are hopping about the planet, with about as much aim and intelligence as a beheaded flea, while God-knows-what is happening to the very air we breathe!"

She turned decisively away from him.

"You are as extinct as the dodo, Mr. Nonstop Leigh," she told him. "The only difference is that you don't know it. Sleep on that. I've got a barocyclonometer to read."

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II

CARTER LEIGH sat over the rough table, staring out of the tent after her hastening boyish figure. He had seen suddenly behind her brisk impersonal efficiency, that she was very tired—and somewhat frightened.

His brief anger at her frank criticism was all turned back upon himself. After all, it was true that such men as Lindbergh and Byrd and Post and Corrigan hadn't left much to be accomplished in the field of nonstop gasoline flight.

No, he deserved her scorn.

But what had frightened her? What *was* happening to the atmosphere? Leigh's mind grappled for a vain moment with the problem, but he could not concentrate now. All he wanted was a chance to sleep.

He stood up, his body stiff and wooden, and reeled to the cot beyond the canvas partition.

"Dammit," he muttered, "what do I care if Lieutenant Laird Cragin flies to Mars on a tissue-paper kite?"

He was asleep before his head touched the pillow. . . .

"Leigh!"

The crisp voice of Elene Gayle awakened him, tense with a suppressed alarm. The tent was dim in the light of an oddly purple dawn. Pausing at the entrance of the tent, her face so gray and tired he knew she had not slept, she called urgently:

"That tornado is coming again. You had better see after your ship."

He tumbled out of the tent and saw her running ahead toward the long metal shed that covered her precious instruments. The dark ocean seemed ominously calm, and the sunrise above it was as splendid as the last.

Against it he saw what the girl, with obvious hesitation, had called a tornado.

It walked out of the flaming east—an endless spiral filament of silver, dropped like some cosmic fishing line from the depthless purple above the fiery sunrise. The foot of it danced across the sea. It moved by incredible bounds. And it was wrapped in a gray wisp of storm.

Leigh caught his breath and started running toward the plane that was standing unmoored on the long white beach where he had climbed out of her on the day before.

But this white funnel of destruction came with the same unthinkable velocity that he had witnessed before. Before he had moved a dozen steps, the white tent sailed over his head. The abrupt, freakish blast of air hurled him flat. His eyes and ears and nostrils were filled with coral sand.

For no more than twenty sec-

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onds the tempest shrieked against the black peak above. Abruptly, then, the air was almost still again. There was only a fluttering queerly chill breeze from the east, following in the storm's wake.

Spitting sand and gasping for breath, Leigh staggered to his feet. The funnel of the storm, like the guide-rope, he thought, dangling from some unseen balloon, was bounding away into the gray west. Its sorrowful howling swiftly diminished.

Leigh turned ruefully toward where he had left the *Phoenix*. The battered old crate had been neatly flipped over on her back by the prankish blast of wind. Leigh shook his head and whistled a few bars of *Barbara Allen*.

"Too bad, old girl," he muttered. "But, considering the state of Tick's exchequer and the high cost of salvage, it looks like goodbye for us."

HE TURNED to survey the station. The tent was gone. The supplies, cooking utensiles and blankets that it had covered were scattered across the beach to the uneasy sea. The tarpaulins had been ripped off the long stack of crates; tumbled in confusion were red drums of Kappa-concentrate rocket fuel, long cylinders of oxygen, bright tins of gasoline, misceallenous cases of food and equipment.

But where was the lady astronomer?

A sudden unreasonable alarm tightened Leigh's throat. He was too well seasoned, he kept telling himself, to get unduly excited over any girl—especially a female scientists who didn't like him anyhow. But he was running through the wrecked camp, shouting her name with a quaver in his voice.

"Miss Gayle! Can you hear me? Elene!"

"Dr. Gayle, if you please."

Her crisp voice came from the interior of the long observatory shed. Half the metal roof had been ripped off. Most of the equipment inside seemed to have been demolished by a huge boulder the wind had hurled from the dark cliffs above. But the slim calm girl, save for the disorder of her short yellow hair and a smudge of grease on her brown cheek, looked untouched. She was ruefully fingering a tangle of twisted levers and crumpled recording drums.

"No more barocyclonometer," she said. "But my visual observations make it imperative that we get in touch with the outside world at once. I believe my worst fears are justified."

"Well, Dr. Gayle," Leigh offered, "if you discover any need of my services, just say so."

"I doubt that you would be very useful." From the preoccu-

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pation of her voice, he knew she gave him less than half her mind; her eyes still measured the smashed equipment. "If you can repair your plane, you had better get away from here before tomorrow morning. Manumotu is an unhealthy locality, just now. And I'm afraid you'll find that the world has got more pressing matters to attend to than organizing relief expeditions to rescue stunt fliers."

"Thank you, Doctor." Leigh bowed. "I hope you can stand a shock. I believe the flying days of the old *Phoenix* are over."

"In that case"—her voice was still abstracted—"you had better salvage what you can of the supplies and equipment. After all, if what I fear is true, it won't make any great difference whether you ever leave Manumotu or not."

Leigh spent all morning stacking the tumbled crates and drums so that they made three walls of a tiny low shelter, roofing it with the torn tarpaulins and collecting there the food and useful articles he found on the beach.

AT NOON, when he carried a plate of food and a steaming tin of fresh coffee to the girl in the observatory building, he found her covered with grime, laboring in tight-lipped silence with the starting-crank of a little motor-generator.

"I've no time to eat," she told him. "I've data of the utmost importance to send. It's urgent that I get in touch with Washington and our rocket laboratory at Alamogordo. And there's something wrong with this plant."

Leigh glanced at the balky mechanism. He set the plate on an empty packing box beside her and rolled up his sleeves.

"Did it occur to you," he inquired, "that, having made a living out of flying gasoline engines for the past ten years, I might know something about them? I see that your carburetor is smashed. If you'll eat your dinner, I'll make you a new carburetor out of a milk can."

Her face showed a weary relief. "If you can do it," she agreed.

While Leigh found tin snips and an empty can, she sat down on the concrete floor beside the packing box. She gulped the hot coffee, wolfed a sandwich of canned ham, and reached for another. In the middle of it, her yellow head dropped forward on her knees. Leigh heard a long sigh and knew she was asleep.

"Poor kid," he muttered.

Even the staccato *chek-chek-chek* of the little motor ten minutes later did not wake her. Leigh twisted the flap of tin that regulated the mixture, then swiftly checked the hookup of the short-wave transmitter.

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He snapped on the receiver. Static snarled at him. An unfamiliar sort of static. The whining ululation of it was oddly like the howling of the storm that had passed. It rose and fell regularly.

Through it, however, he picked up some station—and what he heard stiffened him with fear. For a time he listened, absorbed; then suddenly he hurried to wake the girl.

"It's fixed?" she gasped, starting up. "I didn't mean to sleep—there isn't time."

He caught anxiously at her slim brown arm.

"Elene," he demanded, "what's happening? I was just listening. There's something frightful going on. What is it? Do you know?"

Her blue eyes stared at him. They were dark with sleep—and, he thought, terror. Quick and anxious, her low voice demanded:

"Just what did you get?"

"Storms," he said briefly. "Phenomenal storms. Unseasonable bitter cold. Ice storms even in the tropics. Tidal waves. One against the Atlantic seaboard has probably killed a hundred thousand already. Communications broken everywhere, of course. Panic increasing."

He drew her light body toward him.

"Something has gone wrong with the air, Elene. Do you know what it is?"

Her head nodded slowly.

"I'm afraid I know what it is," she said. "My dispatches can't bring any comfort to the world."

"What is it?"

Her arm twisted free.

"No time to tell you now," she said. "I've got to talk to Washington and New Mexico. And to Laird Cragin—if he's still alive. Our work here has got to be finished tonight. After dawn tomorrow, there may not be any Manumotu."

Leigh gasped. "But—"

Hastening toward the radio, she paused briefly.

"I'll show you tonight," she promised him. "If the seeing is good enough for the telescope, and if we're still alive by then."

She had no more attention for him. He prepared food for himself, ate, and then spent an hour making the tiny little shelter more secure against whatever the girl expected to happen at dawn. And then, heavy with accumulated fatigue, he slept again.

THE air was unwontedly cool on the beach when he woke, and another sunset of uncanny splendor flamed red to the zenith.

He kindled a fire of driftwood, set out another meal, and called the girl. Sipping gratefully from a tin of scalding coffee, she gave him a brief smile.

"You have ability, Leigh," she

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told him. "Ability that has been wasted." Her dark eyes studied him. "Now, I'm afraid, you've very little opportunity left to make use of it."

Sitting silent for a moment in the dancing firelight, she began pouring the cool coral sand through her fingers into little white pyramids.

"If my deductions check out tonight," she said, "I'm afraid the creative functions of our present civilization are just about at an end. The planet will doubtless remain habitable for certain forms of life. Men may even survive in such places as Death Valley. But it will be a little strange if the human race ever recovers its supremacy."

"Tell me—" Leigh began.

She looked at her watch and studied the darkening eastward sky.

"In ten minutes," she said, "I can show you—show you why the earth is no longer a very safe place for nonstop fliers."

Leigh caught his breath.

He looked from the girl into the low, many-colored flames of the driftwood and slowly back again.

"Dr. Elene Gayle," he told her very gravely, "I feel that your frank comments have given me the right to express an equally candid opinion of female astronomers."

She nodded affirmatively.

"I haven't been following my profession altogether for fun, although I enjoy it," he told her. "I have been trying to save up two hundred thousand dollars. That would be enough to begin the manufacture of a gadget I have invented for the greater comfort of rocket passengers, and to build a home."

There was weary loneliness in his voice now.

"For hundreds and thousands of hours, cramped in the cockpit of the old *Phoenix*, I have endured fatigue and the need of sleep by dreaming of that home. Sometimes it is on a Florida key and sometimes it is in a little green valley that I have seen in the Colorado Rockies."

He looked at the girl across the fire.

"But always the most important thing about it was the woman who would live in it with me. I have had one in mind and then another. But none of them, Dr. Gayle, has fitted as well as you do —except, I just hasten to add, in certain regards.

"You must realize that I am telling you this just to make a point—since, what with crackups and your Stellar Shell, Tick Tinker and I have never had more than fifty thousand in a joint account."

A smile touched his lean face in the firelight.

"Physically," he told her, "you

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would do admirably. And you have intelligence, quickness, and, I believe, a sense of humor. But unfortunately you have other qualities that outweigh all these.

"Try to imagine yourself living a civilized life in a civilized home," he challenged. "You just couldn't do it. You wouldn't fit in—not with a schedule of forty-eight minutes a day for food.

"I hope I've made my point—that female astronomers who completely ignore the fact that they are women are just as out of place in a civilized world as extreme nonstop fliers."

Her first low laugh, and the light of amusement in her eyes, halted his argument. But her laughter grew higher and more breathless until she could not stop. Leigh saw that she was hysterical. He dashed a tin can of cold sea-water into her face. She caught a sobbing breath and mopped at her eyes. With another glance at her watch, she rose.

"Come," she said in a shaken voice. "And let's see if there'll be any homes in the world ahead."

III

THE squat mass of the twelve-inch reflector looked through a slit in the end of the building that had escaped destruction. Its clockwork, beneath the humming of the little motor-generator, made a muffled ticking.

Visible in the dim light of a shaded bulb, the girl twisted the turret and swiftly set the circles. Before she had done, Leigh knew that her object was the red point of Mars in the east.

For a long time, sitting with her eye to the lens, she was silent. Leigh could see the trembling of her small hand, touching the control wheels again and again. At last she rose and stood staring eastward through the slit, rubbing at her red eyes. Her face was bloodless.

"Well?" said Leigh.

"It's what I thought," she whispered "Mars!"

Leigh moved into the seat she had left. His eye found the ocular. In its little disk of darkness, a single star burned with changing red and blue. And the disk of Mars, still too near the horizon for good observation, blurred and rippled as if painted on a black flag flying in the wind.

Even for a moment of good seeing, when the image steadied, that mistiness did not clear. But he could distinguish the wide dark equatorial markings—darker, in fact, than he had supposed them—and the white ellipse of the south polar cap.

Two things he saw that puzzled him. Beside the polar cap was a little dark fleck—the darkest marking on the planet—that had an oddly purplish color. And across the yellow-red of the

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planet, toward it, was drawn a twisting silver thread.

The image blurred and shimmered again, and Leigh rose impatiently from the instrument. A little ache throbbed in his unaccustomed eyes. He turned anxiously to the girl.

"Still I don't understand," he said. "I saw a little purple circle, not far from the polar cap. And a queer white thread twisting into it. But everything looked hazy."

"That's just it," her tired voice told him. "Mars is hazed and dim with atmosphere—atmosphere stolen from the Earth. That silver thread is the other end of the tube of force that we have been calling a tornado—sucking air from the Earth across to Mars!"

It took a moment for the full meaning to strike him. Then swiftly he felt the shock of it run through his whole body, and he swayed a little, standing there.

"But," he muttered at last, "I thought there were no Martians!"

"It has been pretty well agreed that there are no intelligent inhabitants," she said. "My father gave up the last great attempt to signal Mars ten years ago. But since that time something has happened to Mars."

"What?"

"It just happens," she told him slowly, "that that purple-blue spot, under the other end of the vortex tube, is exactly where the object we called the Stellar Shell struck Mars, two months ago."

He stared at her, in the dim observatory.

"Then—you think—"

"The inference is inevitable. The Stellar Shell was a ship. It brought living beings to Mars, from somewhere. They needed a heavier atmosphere for survival. Across on Earth—now, at opposition, less than fifty million miles away—they saw the atmosphere they required. With the same science that built and navigated the Stellar Shell, they have reached across to take what they require."

Leigh caught his breath.

"Why didn't they land on Earth in the first place?"

"Why should they, if they are able to reach from one world to another to take what they want? Perhaps Mars, with half the Earth's sunlight and a third of its gravity, suited them better in other regards."

Leigh's brain was spinning.

"Stealing the world's air! How can they possibly do that?"

"I saw one clue," the girl told him. "The two satellites are very difficult objects, even with the refinements of this instrument. It was hard to find them. When I did, they were both much too far from the planet. They are plunging out into space, away from their old orbits!"

"And that means—"

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"It means that they have been cut off from the gravitational attraction of Mars. I think that is because the gravitational pull of the planet, by a power of science quite beyond our grasp, has been focused into a tube of force that reaches fifty million miles across space to our atmosphere."

"That queer tornado?"

"Exactly." The girl nodded. "Our atmosphere is being drawn up it. It seems to race around the Earth every day, because the Earth is turning under it. The violent air currents it causes, and the very loss of it, generate the storms. The unusual sunsets and auroras are doubtless due to the incidental forces that form and direct the tube."

BESIDE the girl, Leigh peered up through the narrow slit. In the bar of purple sky, Mars was a baleful orange-red point. His staggered mind groped for understanding of its menace.

"What can they be?" he whispered.

The girl's own voice was dry.

"Probably they are interstellar voyagers. They came from the south, quite possibly from one of the nearer stars in Centaurus. Beings capable of such a flight must be as far from our comprehension as we are from that of the ants. And we must be as helpless before them."

"Ants can sting," muttered Leigh. But a breath of night air through the slit seemed strangely cold, and he shuddered again. "When do you suppose they'll stop?"

Elene Gayle's yellow head shook in the dimness, wearily.

"Who knows? We could spare them half our atmosphere, and still survive in the lowlands, though the climate everywhere would be far more severe. Possibly they will be satisfied in time. Possibly the advance of the Earth in its orbit will break their tube of force—until the next opposition, two years away.

"Mars is a smaller planet," Leigh said. "They shouldn't need so much air."

"Because of the lighter gravity," the girl told him, "to get the same pressure and density, they would need more."

"So we are at their mercy? Is there nothing to be done?"

Her face was gray, hopeless.

"People will react in the ways predictable from their known characteristics," she said. "Most of the world's population has already been driven into a helpless panic. The governments that stand will try to mobilize their armies—against an enemy they will never even see before they die. Only a few scientists will try to make a calm analysis of the problem, try to discover what, if anything, can be done. I doubt that anything can be done."

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IV

THE rocket arrived before midnight. Elene Gayle had been at the radio all evening, guiding it in with her signals listening to the reports of planet-wide confusion and terror; and trying in vain to get some message through to her Foundation's rocket research laboratory on the New Mexico desert.

When the blue luminescent cathion jets streaked across the stars, Leigh ran with flares to light the beach. It plunged down at an alarming angle, a forward blast checking it in a great cloud of blue flame, and two men tumbled out of it.

The girl came with Leigh to meet them. The thin gray man with a pointed beard was Dr. Laymon Duval, assistant director of the Foundation. And the tall slender black-helmeted pilot, he knew without asking, was Laird Cragin.

Cragin was limping, patched with bandages. The girl nodded to the older man, greeted Cragin with a warm handshake. His handsome face smiled at her.

"Sorry to be late, Gay," he said. "But the freak storm cracked me up in the Marquesas Islands. Had to wait for Dr. Duval, in another fire-boat. But here we are!"

The thin grave voice of the older man cut in, anxiously:

"You are quite certain, Dr. Gayle—certain of the facts in your code message? You really believe that stellar invaders on Mars are robbing the Earth of its air?"

"Duval," the girl asked briskly, "do I make mistakes?"

"Fewer than any man I know," he granted. "What action do you suggest?"

"Return at once," Elene Gayle said instantly. "Get full support from the Preisdent and the War Department. Rush our experimental rocket to completion in New Mexico. Arm it. Send it to Mars to stop the loss of atmosphere."

Duval's gray head shook doubtfully.

"The only thing we can do," he admitted. "But you know I have been in charge at Alamogordo. And I'm reasonably certain that our rocket can't be completed before the air-loss, continuing at the present rate, will force abandonment of the project.

"Even," he added forebodingly, "neglecting the weeks required for the flight—"

"Anyhow," the girl broke in, "we must try. I'll fly back to America with you tonight."

"Tonight?" Carter Leigh echoed her last word. He groped instinctively for the girl's arm.

"I'll go with you, Elene," he said hoarsely. "I'll fly your rocket to Mars."

"Thanks, Leigh." She turned

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briefly toward him. "But you're not a rocket pilot." She turned back to Cragin. "Load fuel and oxygen. We've no time to spare."

"Hullo." In the smooth voice of Laird Cragin was no very cordial recognition. "So you're Lucky Nonstop Leigh? Well, it looks like you stopped, this time, in a rather unlucky spot. Better watch that storm at dawn. It cuts a swatch around the world, every day, through the thirties. Perth and Buenos Aires already gone."

"Back in a moment," the girl said. "I've some notes to get."

Carter Leigh watched her run back into the dark, toward the observatory. Listening silently to Cragin, as he helped lift aboard a drum of the kappa fuel, he tried to hide his despair.

"Sorry, old man," Cragin was saying. "But I guess the job will fall on me. I've been test-hopping the experimental models. If Gay sends her rocket to Mars, I'll go with it."

Leigh caught his breath. Laird Cragin was no doubt a brave and skilful man, even now promising to face certain death for the world's sake. But suddenly Leigh hated him with a blind savage hatred. He trembled, and his fists balled up. Tears swelled in his eyes, until the girl, running back out of the dark with a thick brief case, was only a misty shadow.

"We'd like to give you a lift, old man," Cragin's voice was smoothly regretful. "But this is only a three-place job. And we've no time—"

"Thanks," Leigh managed to say. "But I've got the old *Phoenix*."

Elene Gayle paused to take his hand. Her fingers felt strong and cool.

"Goodbye, Leigh," she said briskly. "Sorry we must leave you. Watch the storm. Make any use you can of our supplies and equipment here. Get north, if you can, out of its track."

Leigh did not answer.

Duval was already in the rocket. Cragin swung the girl in, leapt after her, slid forward the curved transparent hatch. Leigh stood stupidly motionless until the pilot opened it again to shout a warning.

He stumbled back. The blue electronic exhausts bellowed out about him. His skin tingled. Ozone burned his lungs. Blinded, he covered his eyes. When he could see again, the rocket was a dim blue star, dropping and dimming, north-northwest.

CARTER LEIGH stood alone on the beach, softly whistling the melancholy notes of *Barbara Allen*. Alone on Manumotu. It was midnight. Six hours until that world-circling funnel should pass again.

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Southward, beyond the dark loom of the peak, the strange aurora rose again. Sprays of green and orange crossed the zenith. That eerie light showed him the old *Phoenix*, lying upside down on the pale white beach. He plodded heavily down toward her.

"Well, old girl," he muttered. "Cracked up or not, it looks like we've got to make one more flight —unless we want to be picked up by that wind between the worlds."

He stopped abruptly on the coral sand. His eyes lifted swiftly from the battered old crate on the beach, up to the red and baleful eye of Mars, now well past the meridian. His mind pictured that silver cord from world to world.

"Well, why not?"

He stumbled to the old plane. His trembling hand touched the cold metal of her prop. His voice was quick and breathless.

"Why not, old lady?" he muttered again. "There's air all the way. And where there's air, you can fly with gasoline. It's thin and rough, maybe. But we've flown high before, and met our share of bumps."

He walked around the plane, inspected rudder and elevator.

"Quite a wind, I guess. But it will be behind us. And when you've got fifty million miles to make, you need the wind behind you!"

He peered in the darkness at the damaged aileron.

"The percentage may be a billion to one against us. But what's the difference? You're extinct as the dodo, old girl. And I am, too. And we're getting wise to the fact.

"After all, why not? She'll probably be flying to Mars with Cragin, if they get their rocket done. We might as well be there to meet 'em.

"Okay, duchess! Let's get going!"

He knew it wouldn't be easy to get the plane righted and repaired and in the air in the six hours that remained before the wind funnel returned. But he had been in spots almost as tight before. There was the time he came down on the arctic tundra with a broken prop, and whittled out one of his own. . . .

Lucky he had the supplies and equipment at the abandoned station. He walked back for ropes and tackle. In an hour the old ship was on her retractable wheels again, with no more than incidental injury.

He started the motor, taxied the ship up beside the building where he could have electric light, and went to work on the twisted aileron. When that was crudely mended, he found half a dozen other necessary repairs—and still, for all he knew, there might be some hidden harm that

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he could not discover till the ship was in the air.

FOUR precious hours gone before the plane was ready to load. Two things he had to have —gasoline and oxygen. The air was already growing thin on Earth, but it would be thinner still in that tube of force.

Tumbling aside the drums of rocket fuel and cases of supplies, he began carrying crated tins of gasoline and pouring them into the empty tanks. Ten gallons at a trip. The empty tanks held three hundred, and he stacked tins behind the cockpit.

The Southern Cross tilted above the peak. Time fled away. He panted. Even in the chill of morning, he was drenched with sweat. Lucky the Foundation had been so generous with fuel for the motor-generator and the stoves. Lower octane rating than quite agreed with the ancient engine. But, if he started on the other, it would do.

The first ominous promise of dawn was in the east, before that task was done. Now the oxygen. He staggered under the weight of the long steel cylinders. Four of them. That was all he dared load.

Red tongues were leaping up in the east now; the vortex would soon be here. And he'd have to be high to meet it—as high as the *Phoenix* could climb. And even there, in the softer hands of the upper atmosphere, the odds would be overwhelmingly against him.

He made a last dash for an armload of food. He picked up a well-worn book of Keats, the name in it Elene Gayle. Who'd have thought that female astronomers read poetry? He climbed into the cockpit, and jammed his heel against the starter pedal.

While the starter motor wound up, he adjusted his helmet, tested oxygen tubes and reduction valve. He set altimeter and clock, put rudder and elevator trim tabs in neutral. He engaged the clutch, and the ancient motor caught with a roar.

Fine drops of oil on the windshield reminded him that it was in need of an overhaul. If there had been time and tools. . . .

"Crazy," muttered Leigh. "Off to Mars!" Against the roar, he began to whistle *Barbara Allen.*

While the motor warmed, he pushed in the knob that flattened the pitch of the prop, and planned the take-off. The beach was now a ghostly strip of gray beneath that strange sunrise—too short for all the load the *Phoenix* carried.

He taxied to the east end of the beach, turned to face the uneasy west wind, plunged into it with a blast of the gun. The ship was far too heavy. Even with the stick forward all the way, the tail

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wheel still dragged. And the white spray, flying over black teeth of rock beyond the beach, was rushing at him.

But the tail came off the ground. The wheels tapped the sand, lifted, merely flicked the rocks beyond. Leigh caught a long gasping breath. He pushed the knob that started the wheel-retracting pump. The air-speed needle leapt ahead.

Over the dark unquiet sea north of Manumotu, he wheeled into the east. Moment by moment, the sky was flaming redder. He watched for the thread of silver in it, and trimmed the elevators to hold a steady climb.

He slid the cockpit cover forward. The air about him was suddenly calm. He felt a moment of relaxation before the crisis ahead. His eyes left the banks of instruments for a moment, found the worn little book beside him.

"Sentimental fool," he muttered. "Elene Gayle wouldn't carry dead weight to Mars."

He slid back the cockpit cover, hurled the volume into the shrieking wind. He was immediately sorry he had done so. He scanned the east again. Still no tornado. Would it fail him now?

The *Phoenix* was lifting twelve hundred feet a minute. The cockpit grew cold. He plugged in the heater units in his suit. His ears ached. His lungs began to labor in the thinning air. He adjusted the faceplate of his helmet, twisted the oxygen valve.

Then he saw the funnel. It came toward him like a swinging silver rope. Automatically, he banked the ship, flew straight toward it. He saw the dancing tip of it touch Manumotu, nearly six miles beneath. All the green vanished magically from its black cliffs, and a mountain of sea rose over them.

V

THE first blast of wind overtook him so violent that the ship stalled in it. The dead stick was loose in his hands. He shoved it forward, gunned the motor till the ship lived again, pulled it back.

He was trying to climb beside the silver funnel, to edge into it. But the blast of it caught him with a savage and resistless acceleration. The blood was driven out of his head. Darkness pressed down on him. He fought grimly for consciousness and strength to keep the nose of the plane ahead.

For an endless time he was suspended in that battle. His flying of the ship, the swift and delicate reactions that kept it alive and headed up that twisting bore of silver, his skill was more than half conscious. And he had no awareness of anything but life.

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That killing pressure slackened at last, however. His strained heart beat more easily. He was aware of the plane again, creaking, twisted, battered—but still miraculously intact.

He turned up the oxygen, adjusted the prop to increase its pitch to the utmost, opened the auxiliary supercharger. The cold gas filled his lungs again, and he found awareness for things outside the plane.

It was the strangest moment Leigh had known. The curve of the silver tube seemed quite close, on every side. He knew that the air in it, and the plane, now had a velocity quite beyond conception. Yet it seemed that an odd calm surrounded him, and he held the plane, the motor at half-throttle, at its center without difficulty.

Though he knew the tube could be nothing material, nothing more than a vortex of etheric force, the walls of it looked curiously real. Almost glass-like.

Whatever they were, he soon knew that he had better not touch them. For a whirling stick in the air ahead had grown into a great black log—the stripped trunk of some mighty tree, snatched, he supposed, from Manumotu. He saw it spin into that glassy wall. Saw it instantly rebound in a thin dissolving puff of dust and splinters.

He twisted in the cockpit and saw the Earth behind him. Beyond the shimmering walls of the tube it was a mighty hemisphere, suspended in darkness. Gray and misty, patched with great circular areas of white cloud. The Americas were crowding near the rim of it—vast stretches white with unseasonable snow. Asia was invisible in darkness.

Perceptibly, the Earth diminished. It was odd, Leigh thought, that it looked smaller and nearer all the time, not more distant. The two Americas thinned and crept very gradually beyond the lighted curve of the world. The blur of Australia came slowly out of the night; the now invisible foot of the tube, he knew, sweeping destructively across it.

A steady pressure held him back against the seat. At first he had hardly noticed it. But it required effort, he realized, to thrust out his arms against it. The muscles of his neck were already aching.

It was that acceleration. Swiftly, ever more swiftly, that resistless suction was drawing him across toward Mars. So far, so good. He guided the plane around a good-sized granite boulder, drawn with him up the funnel.

The thing was incredible. Flying to Mars in the *Phoenix*—a secondhand crate that Tick Tinker had somehow wangled out

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of the city fathers of Phoenix, Arizona, six years ago. And the Gayle Foundation, with all its millions, had failed to fly its rockets even to the Moon.

But, incredible or not, it was happening.

AFTER the tension and excitement of the last few hours, Leigh felt the pressure of a maddening monotony. He was already weary from loading the plane. And he found this flight the most exhausting he had made.

The air was too thin—so thin the motor coughed and stuttered, even under both superchargers. Even with the oxygen hissing steadily, he felt faint and oppressed. And the cold was a savage thing. Even the heated suit failed to protect him.

Nothing changed. There was the ship and the silver tube. The Earth was soon a dimming point behind, beside the dimmer Moon, and Mars remained only a reddish point ahead. He ate a little, when the clock told him, from his scanty supplies.

Through the tube's pale walls space looked very dark. The stars were more brilliant, more colorful, than he had ever imagined them. But in their myriads he found it almost impossible to discover any familiar constellation. He felt lost amid their alien splendor.

He watched the clock. Its hands crept with deadly slowness. One day at last was gone. Another began. His body prickled painfully and then went numb with cold and fatigue. Sleep dragged at his brain.

But the shattering of the log had told him what would happen if his attention wavered.

"If nonstop fliers are extinct," he muttered once, "It's a good thing for them."

In his first wild resolve and in all the hazards he had met, he had not thought of what might happen next. But now, in this endless monotony, he had ample time to ponder the question: What will I do when I get to Mars?

He had a .45 autoloading pistol and half a dozen extra clips of ammunition with him in the cockpit—a relic as ancient as the *Phoenix*. How, with such a weapon, was he to cope with the science that had made this interplanetary tube?

Presently his fatigue-drugged mind recoiled from the problem, baffled.

Every dragging revolution of the minute hand seemed an eternity. But Mars at last began to grow beside the endless argent coils of the tube. It became a swelling hypnotic eye.

He shook himself in the grasp of monotony and sleep. But Mars stared at him. It was the ochered eye of that sinister intelli-

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gence that was stripping the Earth of air. He tried not to look at it. For its red gaze was deadly.

He woke with a start. The old *Phoenix* creaked and shuddered. The right wing-tip had touched the silver wall, and it was shattered. Twisted metal caught the air, dragged. He set the rudder to compensate.

But the tube had begun to widen. The current of air was slowing. A resistless force pushed him forward in the cockpit. Wind screamed about the *Phoenix*. She was plunging down toward Mars.

He cut the throttle, pulled the old plane back into a spiral. Savage eddies hammered her. She groaned and strained. Bits of metal whipped away from the damaged wing. More and more, it dragged and fell.

But Mars was swiftly growing.

HE STUDIED the clock. Just fifty hours since he climbed off Manumotu beach. He must have come fifty million miles. A million miles an hour—let Laird Cragin beat that in a rocket!

The face of Mars grew broad beneath him. The orange-red of it was white-patched, more and more, with the stolen clouds of Earth. But he found the white ellipse of the shinking polar cap the growing purple circle, above its retreating rim, where the Stellar Shell had landed.

Plunging down through widening funnel that cushioned the air-jet from the Earth, he held the steep spiral of the *Phoenix* toward that purple circle. He would land in the middle of it, and try to deal at once, as best he could with exhausted body and inadequate equipment, with the mysterious science of its creators.

A reckless determination rose in him. A wild elation filled him —the first man to cross space. He was the representative of all mankind, and he felt the strength of all men in him. He was invincible. If he must, he thought, he would make a bullet of the *Phoenix* and dive into whatever seemed the heart of the enemy's strength.

In his feverish excitement he wanted to push back the cockpit cover and yell. His lungs were burning. Then a glance at the barometic altimeter showed that it was registering. Air pressure was mounting again. He was suffering from oxygen intoxication. He partially closed the valve.

For a time a passing cloud hid the purple spot. With battered binoculars, he studied the surface of the planet beyond it. New lakes upon the reddish desert were black or mirror-like. The olive-green bands around them must be vegetation.

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The cloud moved on, and he could see the purple spot again, perhaps only twenty miles below. A patch of dense purple jungle, the binoculars revealed it, far ranker than the olive-green beyond. Had the invaders brought alien seed to Mars?

A green line cut the purple wilderness, opposite the polar crown. And, in the center of the jungle, he saw curious glints and sparklings of green. The glasses picked out machines there. A colossal latticed tube thrust upward.

That mighty metal finger pointed toward the silver funnel, toward the far-off Earth. It was the finger of doom. It, Leigh knew, was the thing he must destroy. He tipped the shuddering old *Phoenix* into a steeper dive.

A long, long flight, his dulled brain thought, just to bring a man to suicide. But for all mankind, for Elene Gayle and her science, even Laird Cragin and his rockets, he had to do it.

Or so he had resolved. But the gesture was denied him.

That long green finger moved abruptly in the purple jungle. It swung down from the Earth, to point at the diving plane. The *Phoenix* was struck a staggering blow. If the power of that needle was the focused gravity of Mars, then a good deal of it, reversed, reacted on the ship. The impact battered Leigh into oblivion.

VI

WHEN Carter Leigh came back to consciousness, the plane was spinning down in a power dive. Her ancient frame quivered; scraps of metal were vanishing from her injured wing. The damaged aileron was jammed again.

He yanked at the stick, fought to bring her out of the dive. He stopped her spinning, and her nose came slowly up. Then he looked below for a landing place. Shallow lakes of yellow rain water patched the red desert. He found a level ridge that looked firm and dry enough, extended the landing gear.

But the air even here at the surface was still very thin. Lesser gravity made a partial compensation, but the landing speed must still be dangerously high. Still he came down.

The red ridge flashed up at him, and he tried to level off. For all his efforts, the dragging right wheel touched first, too hard. The plane bounced, veered dangerously. The bounce carried him abnormally high. He had time to get the plane half straight again. Another bounce, to which the whole plane shook and groaned. Next time, in spite of him, the injured wing grazed and crumpled. He fought to right the ship; but the good wing dipped, plowed into red mud, and was

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shattered to kindling. The fuselage rebounded; skimmed along on its side for a hundred yards in a spray of crimson mud; at last was still.

Leigh clambered painfully out of the wreckage. He felt his bruised limbs. Despite the stunning finality of the crackup, he found no bones broken. His helmet had been knocked off. His lungs had to labor, but they found oxygen enough.

Pale yellow-green shoots, pulpy and fragile, were pushing up through the wet red soil at his feet. He had come to rest at the margin of a wide shallow lake, that mirrored the drizzling sky. Far beyond, above the gentle red hills patched with fresh olive-green, he could see a long low line of purple darkness. And his ears, after they had become accustomed to the silence, heard a continual distant roaring in the sky.

That roar was the wind of stolen air from Earth. That line was the purple jungle. Beyond it was the great machine of the stellar invaders, that had to be destroyed. Leigh, as wearily confident as if nothing were now impossible, set about that distant project.

He snapped the action of the old automatic, slipped it in his pocket. Two five-gallon tins of gasoline and the remaining cylinders of oxygen he made into a bale, padded with his thick flying suit.

On Earth, he could not have moved them. Even here, their weight was eighty pounds, and his own sixty more. The burden simplified the matter of walking. But the effort of breathing taxed his lungs.

The horizon was closer than it looked. He dwelt upon that fact for encouragement, and walked toward the barrier of the unknown jungle. The roaring grew louder in the sky. He reeled with fatigue. The slow drizzle of stolen moisture continued, interrupted with flurries of sleet. Cold sank into his bones.

He came at last to the jungle and super-cactus. Jagged purple spines grew with a visible motion; they stabbed into the red mud, sprouted, lifted new barbed lances. It was a barrier too thick and dense to hope to cross.

Utterly disheartened, he flung down his burden. Mechanically, he ate a can of beans he had slipped into the pack. Then quite suddenly he slipped into sleep.

THE slow thrust of a living bayonet wakened him, drenched and stiff with cold. His chest felt congested and breathing took a painful effort. He picked up his burden and slogged off westward through the red mud, skirting the advancing jungle.

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It was in that direction that he thought he had seen the green slash. An exhausting hour brought him to it—a broad level pavement of some glistening, bright-green stuff. The surface was perfect, but the bank beneath it had a surprising look of antiquity.

This road came straight out of the north. It cut into the jungle, the walls of purple thorns arching over it. After brief hesitation—lest he meet its masters unawares—Leigh trudged in upon it.

The purple shadow of the jungle fell upon him. The roaring continued in the sky; cold rain and sleet fell endlessly. Leigh plodded endlessly on, ignoring fatigue and cold and hunger. Once he stopped to drink from a puddle on the road. A lancing pain stabbed through his chest.

A humming clatter startled him. He stepped off the road, thrust himself into the purple spines. A huge three-wheeled conveyance came swiftly along the pavement. The bed of it was piled with something pale-green and crystalline—something mined, perhaps, in the equatorial regions.

Straining his eyes in the purple dusk to see the driver, Leigh glimpsed only a gelatinous arm. That arm and a yellow eye and another translucent waving limb were all he ever saw of the actual invaders. Their nature, the motives and the course of their flight, the mysteries of their science, the extent of their designs upon the solar system—all these remain defined only by conjecture and dread. The invaders remain but a dark-limned shadow of the unknown.

The brief polar night was already falling when the truck passed. It was bitterly cold. The rain turned again to driving pellets of sleet, and heavy frost crackled over the roadway and the jungle spines.

The roaring overhead was louder now. A greenish glow filtered down the tunnel of the road. And at last, dead with fatigue, Leigh dragged himself to the edge of the central clearing in the jungle.

He perceived no source of light. But the surrounding wall of thorns and the fantastic structures before him were visible in a dull green radiance. He saw what must have been the remains of the Stellar Shell—a huge projectile, whose nose had plowed deep into the planet. Half its upper parts had been cut away; it must have served as a mine of the green metal.

Beyond it, swung between three massive piers, was the latticed tube, now horizontal, pointing across the pole toward the unseen Earth. Leigh caught his breath. Nerved with a last spurt

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of unsuspected strength, he staggered forward in the green shadow of the Stellar Shell.

Nothing stopped him. He swayed across a little open space beyond, dropped with his burden in the darkness between the three piers. His hands began shaping a basin in the half-frozen mud.

A hoarse coughing hoot, from some half-seen structure beyond, spurred him to desperate haste. He ripped open his bale, began pouring his ten gallons of gasoline into the basin. An unaccountable rasping rattle lifted the hair at the back of his neck. He heard a metal clatter, nearer.

Fumbling desperately, he opened the cocks of the oyxgen cylinders. The compressed stuff came out with a hissing roar, half liquid, half gas. It evaporated and enveloped him in a cloud of frost.

He turned the blue jets into the gasoline. Ticklish work. Before the invention of the cathion blast, gasoline and oxygen had been the favorite fuel of rocket experimenters. An efficient mixture of them, as makers of aerial bombs had sometimes demonstrated, had five times the explosive energy of nitroglycerine.

This wouldn't be a very efficient mixture. The gasoline froze into brittle blue chunks, and the oxygen was swiftly boiling away. The results were unpredictable.

Above the dying hiss of the jets, Leigh heard that rattle and the rasping hoot, very close to him now. He straightened in the thick white fog, and saw the yellow eye. A huge luminescent yellow pupil, fringed with a ragged membrane.

A pointed metal rod, glowing with strange green, appeared beneath the eye. It thrust toward him through the fog. Leigh stumbled backward; his numbed fingers found the automatic, fired into the yellow eye. It blinked and vanished, and the rod clattered in the fog.

Leigh staggered back to the end of the Stellar Shell and began shooting into his mud basin between the three great piers. At his third shot, the world turned to blue flames, and went out utterly.

THE massive green wall of the cosmic projectile shielded him from the blast. And it sheltered him somewhat from the tempest that followed.

He came to, lying in the freezing mud, nostrils bleeding, head ringing. Dragging himself up behind the shielding barrier, he saw that all the great structures of the invaders had been leveled. The green glow had disappeared.

He started at some motion in the gray twilight; it was a gelatinous arm, waving slowly above a pool of mud. He emptied the automatic at it—and it sank.

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Then the wind came. The interplanetary air-jet, now that the cushioning forces by which the invaders had sheltered themselves had been removed, came down in a shrieking blast. The mighty walls of the Stellar Shell were all that stood before it.

For half an hour, battered and half suffocated, Leigh clung to a metal bar in its shelter. The wind blew itself out abruptly, the last of the ravished air. The small sun rose warmingly in a sky suddenly serene, and Leigh slept half the day in its heat.

In the afternoon, still aching with weariness, he found the roadway again, and plodded back through the flattened jungle toward the wreck of the *Phoenix*. Hungry, bitter with loneliness, he began to regret that he had survived.

Some swift decay had attacked the fallen purple thorns, but the native life of Mars was thriving exceedingly. In the changing landscape, it was difficult to find the plane. When at last he reached it, he ate the solitary can of corned beef that remained of his supplies and then rigged up a directional antenna for the transmitter.

For several reasons, this last hopeless message was important. He wanted to end the fears of the Earth; wanted to help Tick Tinker; and he wanted Dr. Elene Kathrine Gayle to know that he had flown nonstop to Mars, usefully, with gasoline.

"Mars, calling Earth," he repeated. "Carter Leigh, on Mars, calling C Q, Earth. Landed here yesterday. Destroyed invaders last night with gasoline bomb. Anticipate no danger further loss of air. Inform Tick Tinker, New York, nonstop flight to Mars made with Zerolube oil. Now marooned on Mars. Goodbye, Earth."

He repeated that message, between intervals of sleep, until the little battery was exhausted. Then he set himself, wearily and without hope, to begin the life of the first Robinson Crusoe of space.

In a pot cut from the end of a gasoline tank, he made stew, queer-flavored but edible, from the fruits and seed of some of the native plants. Hoping to reach a less severe climate in the equatorial regions and driven by a desire to learn more of whatever lost people had built the road, he stowed all the useful articles he could salvage upon a sledge made from the elevator of the *Phoenix*, and set off northward along the straight green pave.

The Earth, now drawing away from Mars, was a splendid golden morning star. Sight of it, in the frosty dawns when he could not keep warm enough to sleep, filled him with tragic loneliness.

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One day he threw away the gun, to end his desire to use it on himself. The next he turned back along the road, and spent all the day to find it and clean it again. But when it was ready he put it on the sledge and plodded on down the glassy pavement.

He had counted thirty Martian days. With the slow advance of spring, and his weary progress northward, the climate had become a little more endurable. He was cheered sometimes by the sight of young, familiar-looking shoots—grown from seed borne upon that interplanetary wind.

But his body was gaunt with privation. He had a recurrent painful cough. Sometimes his meals from the Martian plants brought violent indigestion. The end, he clearly saw, would be the same, whether he used the gun or not.

Then the night, the incredible night, when he woke in his chill bed beside a smouldering fire, to hear the familiar rhythmic drum of cathion rockets. He saw a blue star following down the roadway from the south. Breathless and quivering, he sprang up to feed his fire.

MANTLED in the blue flame of its forward jets, the rocket came down upon the road. His firelight showed the legend on its side: *Gayle Foundation.* It would be Laird Cragin, he supposed, another exile—

But the bare grimy yellow head that appeared, when its thick door swung open, was the head of Elene Gayle.

"Greetings, Mr. Lucky Leigh," her brisk voice said. "And congratulations on the aptness of your nickname. . . . You are all right?"

"Right as rain," he croaked hoarsely. "Only—surprised!"

"We finished the rocket." She was oddly breathless. "When the guns and explosives were no longer necessary, we loaded it with return fuel and supplies for a few weeks of exploration."

"Cragin?" demanded Leigh.

"There were two places," said the girl. "After we took off, I made him drop back by parachute." Her voice was suddenly very crisp. "I have the honor to bring you, Leigh, in token of the gratitude of Earth for your recent remarkable nonstop flight, the medals and awards—"

Her voice broke abruptly. She stumbled out of the rocket, and came running across the strange pavement to meet him. In his arms, trembling, she clung to him.

THE END

When answering an advertisement be sure to say you saw it in FANTASTIC

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(Continued from page 8)

ability School. That get-up she is sporting would 'blend in' with a beatnik scene about like a French pastry among the fig-newtons.

The Human Zero: ghaaa. Things which get cold enough to freeze but thaw almost instantly because, ". . . it happened so quickly that these things didn't get so awfully cold." A powder (which itches, yet) which when sprinkled on the head "did something to the nerve ends" which made them "receptive to a certain peculiar etheric current," this in turn causing the cells to "dissolve, shrink into a smaller and smaller space, and then disappear." Ghu. Why do you suppose that the rats had been treated? Maybe Crome liked to watch them scratch? The story gives the impression that Rodney scragged himself because the jig was up, but that wasn't really it at all. You see, his lungs had been giving him such a bad time, itching and all, ever since he'd inhaled that powder in the cigarette that he just couldn't take it any more.

The rest of the issue was adequate to good with "This is Your Death" quite good indeed. Hope we see more of Teichner.

Interior art somewhat better than average this issue. Hope you can keep it at this level.

Now to the letter column. *Titus Groan* is, of course, a Gothic fantasy. In fact, it's *the* Gothic fantasy. You can't really know the meaning of Gothic if you have never read Peake's work. I suppose that so few people know of the novel due to the extreme difficulty in obtaining it. Practically no library stocks it and the price of the book is nearly prohibitive for most. The Mechanics' Institute in San Francisco has it, if you should happen to live in that city and know someone who belongs to the Institute. The only solution to this problem that I can see is for many fantasy fans to begin yelling long, loud, and clear for the works of Mervyn Peake. To my knowledge there are three novels in the Gormenghast series: *Titus Groan, Gormenghast,* and *Titus Alone.* I have just heard of the last myself, and it is not supposed to be quite on a par with the other two.

None of the works in question (*Titus Groan,* the Ring trilogy, *Alice in Wonderland,* the Fafhrd —Grey Mouser series, & *The Incompleat Enchanter*) are sf, for that matter, with the possible exception of *The Incompleat Enchanter,* and even it more properly belongs in the nor fish-nor-fowl category of science-fantasy, in my opinion. The only remotely science-fictional touch ever to appear, so far as I can recall, in

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the Grey Mouser—Fafhrd series, was the recent bit of the 'monster' riding on the sea-serpent. Fafhrd's speech about other worlds on that occasion I consider to be one of the more beautiful dissertations on relativity it has ever been my pleasure to read, in fact if all of the series were as good as that story I would feel impelled to award Leiber a higher place in my personal Fantasy Rating than that he now holds.

Pat Scott
Box 401
Anacortes, Wash.

● *Why should a Mechanics Institute have a copy of* Titus Groan? *Probably the librarian thought the word was "groin"—which, as every Mechanic knows, is the projecting solid angle formed by the meeting of two vaults, growing more obtuse at the top.*

Dear Editor:

In looking over the editorial comments in the Jan. issue of FANTASTIC I was interested to note the mention of the book *Titus Groan.* Indeed, as you say, there does seem to be very few people who have heard of it. Especially in book stores. You and the letter contributor to whom your remarks were addressed may be interested to know that there is a more recent work by

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the same author called *Gormenghast.*

Genres aside, they are both, in my opinion, superb works and why they have never been published in the U. S. I am at a loss to say. *Titus Groan* was available at the public library, but I had to send to England to get a copy of *Gormenghast.* At any rate I will certainly continue to buy FANTASTIC. I figure any editor who re-reads the works of Mr. Mervyn Peake is definitely not to be trifled with.

Bailey Hugh Custer
534 Broadway
San Francisco, Calif.

● *Matter of fact there are two signs on my desk. One says:* DO NOT TRIFLE WITH EDITOR. *The other says:* KEEP OFF THE GORMENGRASST.

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

I was glad to see from the letter column that someone else had read Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan.* I have it and the sequel *Gormenghast* and am looking for the third in the series, *Titus Alone.* I agree with Pat Scott that these and the Ring trilogy by Tolkien far surpass anything Lieber or DeCamp has written.

C. W. Brooks, Jr.
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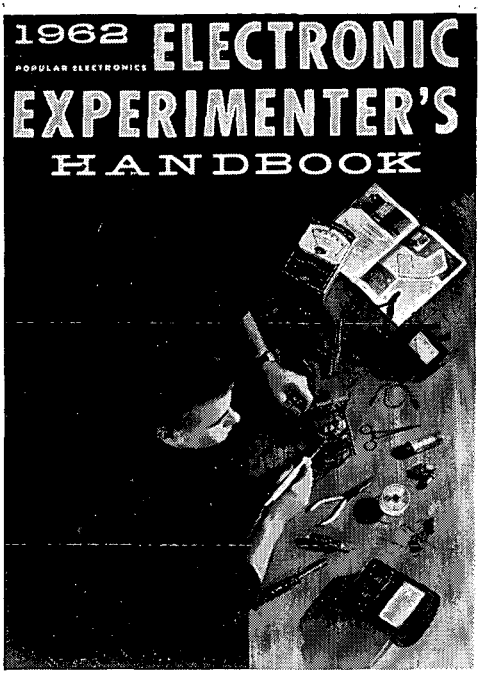

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"My G-God! Vandercook croaked. "I—I'm marooned!"

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See *Dr. Birdmouse*

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